

Cafeteria workers

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cafeteria because, "Johnny gets what Johnny likes and then he never learns to eat anything else."

She is quick to add, "Students are learning other things as well as good nutrition when they buy lunch. They learn good table manners and the responsibility of carrying money. There is a lot to be learned in the lunchroom."

Furthermore, she adds, "If you constantly offer balanced lunches for 12 years, they have to learn something about nutrition."

According to information from the Dairy Council, a lunch packed at home containing the same nutrition as a school lunch is more expensive than school cafeteria prices. Also, school personnel are trained in providing high-density

nutrition.

June says that many lunches packed at home do not contain nutritious food, but food that is expensive and easy to pack.

Peer pressure, that oft-criticized foe of young people, can sometimes be helpful. Mrs. Witman recalls that when they introduced tacos several years ago she visited one section of each grade, showing the ingredients in tacos and allowing the children to taste them. "We asked them to watch for tacos on the menu and tell their friends about them. You have to promote things," she says.

She said she has tried getting student groups to taste new items before placing them on the menu, asking the students if they will eat it and if other students will buy the

item.

Mrs. Witman has expanded her duties beyond the cafeterias, and often goes into the classroom and to home economics classes to promote nutrition education. She also likes to be in a cafeteria every day at lunch to observe and interact.

She noted that after elementary school there is a big change in students' eating habits, and they begin to try a wider variety of foods. Mrs. Witman would also like to see schools having recess before lunch so that children would not race through their lunch to go play.

One of the challenges of preparing menus is using the commodities offered by the government. In the last few years there has been a "deluge of cheese" according to Mrs. Witman. "There is also a lot of powdered milk and powdered eggs."

"I don't always take everything they offer," she says. "If it is just going into storage, then I think maybe somebody else can use it. I go by what I have on hand and what I can use. Sometimes I wish they would just give us the cash so we could buy what we want, but I understand the program."

She must also consider the number of people working the cafeterias when choosing menus. "When the government reimbursement figures went down so did our hours," she points out. That means fewer people and simpler preparation.

An innovation of hers was to use printed menus which offer nutrition education on the reverse side. Carnation provides the nutrition information, and she fills out the menus, using art from Hempfield students to brighten up the page.

Another change has been offering kindergarten classes snacks from the cafeteria instead of the

Packing lunch

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chocolate so they can make chocolate milk. And she points out, "Yogurt is a nice change from sandwiches."

Homemade bologna cut in chunks and cheese cut in chunks are a welcome change of pace. "I don't always put a sandwich in because it gets boring." A favorite for her children is pie, and she will sometimes treat them by including a "sip-up" beverage.

There is a real secret to a good school lunch. Linda says, "Lunches always taste better with a little love note from home. It's always a surprise." Occasionally her children will write notes for each other. LilliAnn agrees, I like to write a note or cut out a cartoon to send in their lunch."

Some other ideas that might work in your school lunches include wrapping cheese or meat around a commercial breadstick, using a wooden pick to hold the meat in place. This makes "crunch-wich," a pleasant change.

For a "walking salad" try slicing off the top of an apple, hollow out the core, leaving the bottom intact. Brush the hollow with orange or lemon juice, then fill with peanut butter mixed with raisins, cream cheese, chocolate chips or caramels. Replace the top of the apple and wrap in plastic wrap for a nutritious treat. Dried fruit adds easy-to-pack interest.

traditional milk and cookies. The snacks are nutritious and are often tied in with the school menu, helping the children become familiar with foods offered through the school.

The school cafeteria offers good nutrition, and enough fuel to get students through the long afternoon.

Using graham crackers instead of bread takes away the monotony of peanut butter sandwiches, and adding something like raisins, carrots, coconut, or crushed pineapple will be a nice surprise.

Lettuce can be packed separately to add crunch to sandwiches, and using pita bread adds interest.

Fruit juice can be frozen in either small cans or plastic containers, then wrapped in plastic to contain the moisture as it defrosts. The cold of the juice will keep other foods cool until lunch, and the juice can be eaten or drunk as slush.

With a little imagination, your lunch boxes can be filled with interesting, nutritious food which will delight students and energize them for the afternoon.



Hot dogs are a popular menu item and usually bring out a high number of buyers for that day. Here, Stella puts the steaming hot dogs in a warmer to await the first onslaught of students.



Naomi prepares a sandwich for her lunch.

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