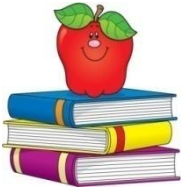


Alternatives to Food as Rewards



Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

Food is commonly used to reward students for good behavior and academic performance. It's an easy, inexpensive and powerful tool to bring about immediate short-term behavior change. Yet, using food as reward has many negative consequences that go far beyond the short-term benefits of good behavior or performance.

Research clearly demonstrates that healthy kids learn better. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, schools must provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Students need to receive consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. Finding alternatives to food rewards enhances a healthy school environment.

Consequences of Using Food as Reward

Compromise Classroom Learning:



Schools are institutions designed to teach and model appropriate behaviors and skills to children. Nutrition principles taught in the classroom are

meaningless if they are contradicted by rewarding children with candy and other sweets. It's like saying, "You need to eat healthy foods to feel and do your best, but when you behave or perform your best, you will be rewarded with unhealthy foods."

Contributes to Poor Health:

Foods commonly used as rewards (like candy, and cookies) can contribute to health problems for children, e.g., obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cavities. Food rewards provide unneeded calories and displace healthier food choices.

Encourages Overconsumption of Unhealthy Foods:

Foods used as rewards are typically "empty calories" foods – high in fat, sugar and salt with little nutritional value. Decreasing the availability of empty calorie foods is one strategy schools can use to address the current childhood obesity epidemic.

Contributes to Poor Eating Habits:

Rewarding with food can interfere with children learning to eat in response to hunger and satiety cues. This teaches kids to eat when they are not hungry as a reward to themselves, and may contribute to the development of disordered eating.

Increases Preference for Sweets:

Food preferences for both sweet and non-sweet food increase significantly when foods are presented as rewards. This can teach children to prefer unhealthy foods.

Schools can help promote a healthy learning environment by using nonfood rewards.

Elementary School Students

- Make deliveries to office
- Teach Class
- Sit by Friends
- Eat lunch with teacher or principal
- Eat lunch outdoors with the class
- Have lunch or breakfast in the classroom
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Play a favorite game or do puzzles
- Certificates
- School supplies
- Walk with the principal or teacher
- Fun Physical Activity break
- Extra recess
- Show and Tell
- Paperback book
- Have extra art time



Nutrition Philosophy During Student School Day

School meals are the main source of nutrition. Snacks are to:

1. Supplement the meal
2. Help, not hinder, students' nutrition
3. Provide serving size and calories based on age and activity

Discretionary calories can be used under the guidance of parents at home.

* See Appendix 6 on discretionary calories

- Trip to treasure box filled with nonfood items (stickers, tattoos, pencils, erasers, bookmarks...)

Middle School Students

- Sit with friends
- Listen to music during deskwork
- End-of-class chat break
- Reduced homework or "no homework" pass
- Extra credit
- Fun brainteaser activities
- Computer time
- Assemblies
- Field Trips
- Eat lunch outside or have class outside



High School Students

- Extra Credit
- Reduced homework
- Drawings for donated prizes

"Rewarding children with unhealthy foods in school undermines our efforts to teach them about good nutrition. It's like teaching children a lesson on the importance of not smoking, and then handing out ashtrays and lighters to the kids that did the best job listening."

Marlene Schwartz, PhD, Co-Director,
Yale Center of Eating and Weight Disorders