Ask the Expert:

What is the Summer Food Service Program?

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About 22.1 million kids in low-income families receive free or reduced price school lunches. To ensure these children have enough to eat when school is out, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to children under 18 years old with free and nutritious meals. SFSP pairs with local government, camps, schools, and private nonprofits to provide low-income children with food when they are not in school. Children can receive up to 2 meals daily during the summer and other school breaks such as spring break or winter vacation.

What should I know about SFSP?

• SFSP is geared towards low-income children but many program sites are ‘open’ and do not require registration to participate.
  • The ‘mobile meal’ option delivers food to multiple locations on a route for children who live in isolated areas.
  • Adults over 18 years old enrolled in educational programs for persons with disabilities may also be eligible.
  • ‘Program Adults’ who help with the program are able to receive meals with their children. Some locations will serve meals to ‘Non-program’ adults as well.

How can I get involved?

If you are involved in an organization interested in sponsoring SFSP, the State agency can help with eligibility. You can also volunteer to help serve or transport meals with your local SFSP sites. Please see the above image for more information.

Source: https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program
Image Source: https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/raise-awareness

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Summer is here and the familiar smells of bonfires, barbecues, and cookouts are filling the air as people everywhere fire up their grills. Food safety is always important to keep in mind when preparing any meal, but especially important for large gatherings of friends and family to make sure everyone stays safe and healthy while enjoying their food. The importance of thoroughly cooking meats in order to prevent foodborne illness is a common topic of discussion; most people are aware that undercooked meats may lead to foodborne illness. On the other hand, the dangers of eating overcooked meats are not as widely known.

When meats, including beef, pork, and poultry, are cooked at a high temperature, chemicals known as heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are formed. HCAs and PAHs are known to be mutagenic, meaning they may cause changes in DNA which lead to an increased risk of cancer. Studies in animals have shown that exposure to HCAs and PAHs can cause cancer in rodents. Studies in human populations have also shown a relationship between eating overcooked meat and cancer.

In order to reduce exposure to HCAs and PAHs, the amount of red meat and processed meats in the diet should be limited. When cooking meats, avoid exposing them to an open flame and do not prolong cooking time. In order to minimize the amount of time meat is exposed to a flame when grilling, meats can be precooked at a lower temperature in a microwave, oven, or by boiling. Meat should be turned often to prevent burning on either side. Furthermore, any charred pieces of meat should be removed before eating.

Images: https://creativecommons.org
Eating Right: Calorie Needs
Written by Sammy Wu, College of Health and Human Sciences, Purdue University

According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), approximately 33% of children and 66% of adults in the United States eat too many calories on a regular basis, resulting in obesity. While daily caloric needs between people may be different because of height, weight, health conditions, and activity levels, the 2015 USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend that children between the ages of 2 and 8 should eat between 1000 and 1400 calories daily, and children older than age 9 as well as adults should consume between 1600 and 3200 calories daily. To find out your recommended daily caloric intake based on physical activity, gender, and age, visit https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/usda_food_patterns/EstimatedCalorieNeedsPerDayTable.pdf.

In general, daily calories should come from: fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, proteins, and oils. The USDA MyPlate shows the amount of foods from each food group that should be consumed.

Sources: https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/
https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/MyPlate
Image: https://www.choosemyplate.gov

Fajita Chicken Salad

Ingredients (4 servings)
• 2 cans chicken breasts
• 1 bell pepper
• 1 cup red onions and mushrooms
• 4 oz fajita marinade
• 8 oz lettuce
• cheese/guacamole/salsa, if desired

1. Chop the lettuce and place into serving bowl. Cut the red onions, bell peppers, mushrooms, and chicken breasts into slices.

2. Add the sliced chicken, mushrooms, peppers, and onion into a medium-sized pan.

3. Add marinade and boil on medium heat until the chicken and vegetables are fully cooked.

4. Add the cooked chicken and vegetables into the serving bowl containing the lettuce.

5. Add guacamole, salsa, and/or cheese into the bowl and mix.

Underlining denotes TEFAP commodity ingredients

Recipe source: https://www.livestrong.com/recipes/healthy-chicken-fajita-salad/
Photos: www.creativecommons.org
Lunch is the half way point of a tiring school or work day, and provides energy for the rest of the day. The food that children eat for lunch should have energy but also be rich in nutrients to keep them healthy and protect them from illness. The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 pushed the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to update their nutritional standards for school lunches to make sure children were getting the nutrients they need. In 2012, the USDA set new guidelines for school cafeterias across the U.S. These improved nutritional guidelines promote eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. They also reduce sugar and sodium, offer more lean proteins, and provide both low-fat and fat-free milk to students.

These updated guidelines require more varieties of vegetables and fruits like iron rich greens, colorful peppers, and Vitamin C-packed pineapple to be added to menus. Also, all whole grains offered in school cafeterias must be at least 51% whole grain. School lunches may not contain added trans-fat; meaning they must avoid items such as potato chips, processed meats, fried foods, some cookies and cake frostings. After these guidelines were set, some schools found it difficult to prepare and purchase foods that fit the new requirements. Because of these difficulties, the start dates for certain requirements --sodium reduction, whole grains and milk options-- were pushed back to the fall of 2017 to give struggling schools more time to prepare for the menu changes.

These changes were put in place by the School Meal Flexibility Rule, with the goal of giving schools time to find foods that fit the new guidelines and are also foods the children in their school like and choose. Then school lunch can give kids both the energy and nutrients they need to keep them growing and healthy.

Sources: [https://schoolnutrition.org/AboutSchoolMeals/SchoolNutritionStandards/](https://schoolnutrition.org/AboutSchoolMeals/SchoolNutritionStandards/)  
[https://schoolmealsthatrock.org/](https://schoolmealsthatrock.org/)  