

# SCHOOL MEALS: A SMART AND EASY CHOICE!

Children who eat lunches provided by the school meals program are more likely to eat a greater variety of foods—providing nutrients that are often missing from children’s diets.

## Dairy Food Group

One cup of low-fat or fat-free milk provides your child with calcium, vitamin D and protein for strong bones and teeth.

## Vegetables Food Group

Half a cup of fresh vegetables provides your child with vitamin A for healthy skin and eyes.

## Fruits Food Group

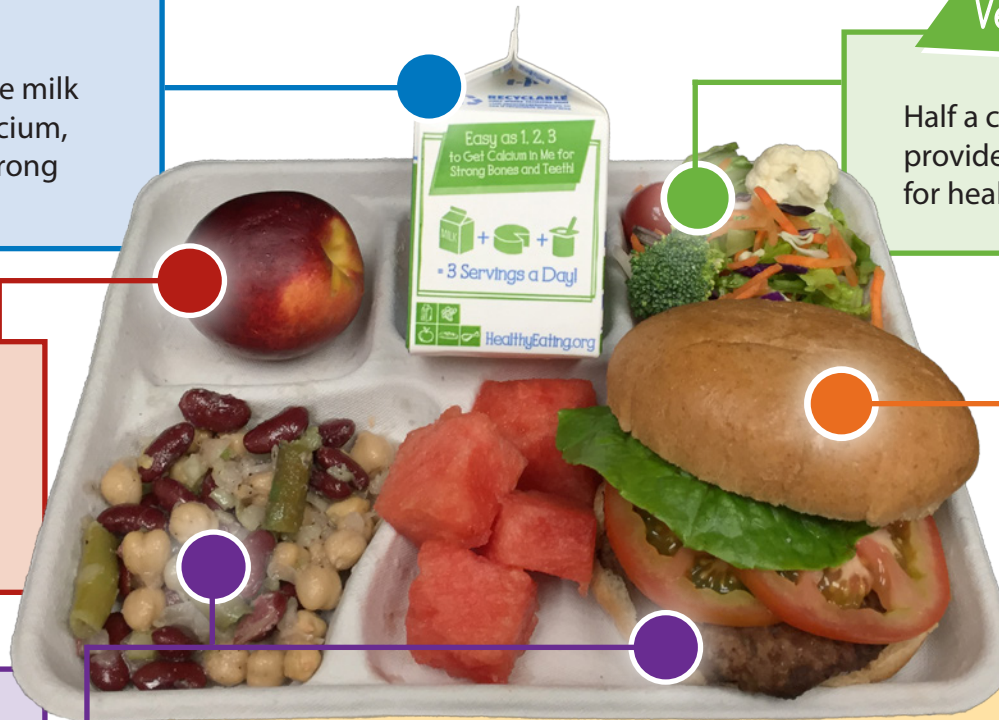
Half a cup of fresh fruit provides vitamins needed to help heal wounds and boost immunity.

## Protein Food Group

School lunches always provide foods that are high in protein for strong muscles.

## Grains Food Group

At least half of all grain offerings are whole grain, providing a good source of fiber and energy needed for your child to learn and be physically active.



Nearly 75 percent of children do not eat enough dairy, vegetables, fruits and whole grains.<sup>1,2</sup> The National School Lunch Program provides foods from all five food groups for optimal health. Eating more of these foods will provide children with the vital nutrients they need most.

To make a meal payment or to confidentially learn if your child is eligible for free or reduced price school lunches please visit:



Adding Dairy, Vegetables and Fruits to students' diets improves academic performance<sup>3</sup>

Students who participate in school breakfast or lunch programs show improvement in grades and standardized test scores.<sup>3</sup>



Here are a few things you can do to help encourage your child to eat more of these foods:

Ask your child which vegetables and fruits they tried today.

Encourage your child to try new vegetables and fruits from school lunch offerings.

Go over the school menu with your child ahead of time so they can think about what they want to eat.



School lunches taste good to children, and they are healthy!

### School Lunches:

- Contain one-third of the recommended nutrients needed each day.
- Provide healthy, balanced meals.
- Ensure students have the option to select dairy, vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
- Enhance children's learning abilities by fueling their minds with nutrient-rich foods.
- Save time by not having to pack lunch.



In California, 373 school districts actively participate in Farm to School to bring in local milk, vegetables, fruits and protein, reaching over 3,446,240 students each year.<sup>4</sup>

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service Nutrition Standards, National School Lunch Program

1. 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. 2015.
2. [https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/nutrition\\_insights\\_uploads/Insight32.pdf](https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/nutrition_insights_uploads/Insight32.pdf)
3. Bradley BJ, et al. J. Adol. Health. 2013; 52:523-532
4. USDA Farm to School Census, 2015

About Dairy Council of California  
Dairy Council of California provides science-based nutrition information and programs to elevate the health of children and parents in California through the pursuit of lifelong healthy eating habits.

