

Research shows that children will eat a healthy diet if given enough time for lunch



According to the study, spending a minimum of 25 minutes in the cafeteria guarantees a healthier meal for children.

Pupils that take a minimum of 25 minutes to lunch in the cafeteria are more prone to choose fruits and vegetables and will benefit from a much more balanced meal according to a new study from the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston.

In their introduction, the study's authors outline that in the United States, over 30 million children from low-income families receive one free or low-cost meal which represents nearly half of their daily caloric intake.

The researchers have studied the link between the duration of a meal taken in the cafeteria, food choice and the pupil's caloric intake. The data was collected over six non-consecutive days in the framework of the MEALS study conducted in a school setting in the United States in 2011 and 2012.

Their conclusions have been published in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The results indicate that when a child had less than 20 minutes to eat, they were much less inclined to choose fruit for dessert than their peers who spent more than 25 minutes having their meal (respectively 44 per cent against 57 per cent).

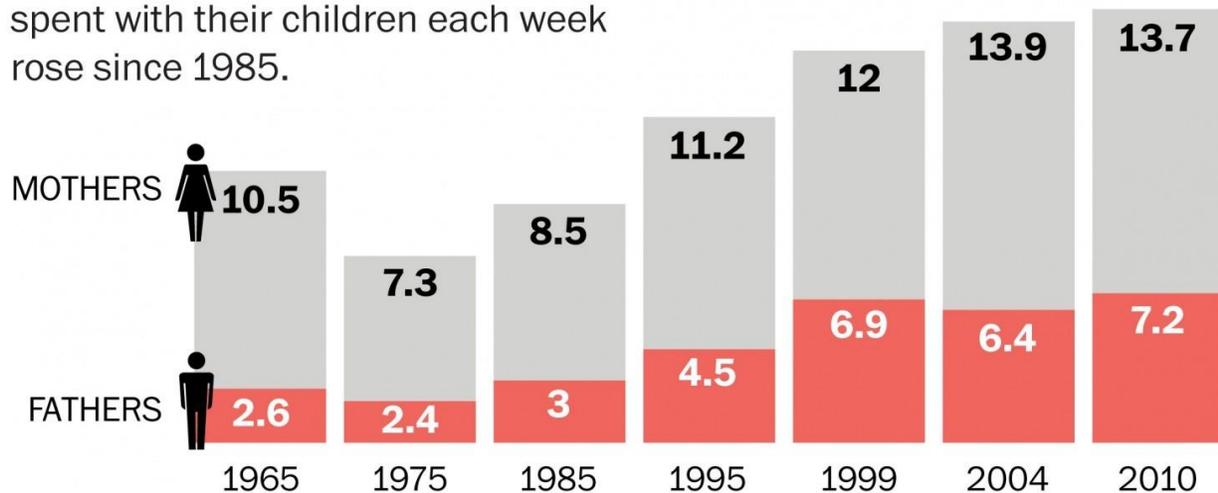
The children whose lunch period was shorter were also less likely to consume their appetizers (-13 per cent), dairy (-10 per cent) and vegetables (-12 per cent). According to the researchers, this indicates that young children who are given less time to lunch fail to consume key foods like whole grain cereals rich in fiber and calcium which are part of a balanced meal.

According to the research, children need a minimum of 25 minutes to have lunch. The researchers have explained that the number corresponds to a minimal estimated duration to guarantee a healthy and balanced meal. Students who benefit from a similar daily lunch period are more inclined to add a fruit to their lunch-tray and have more time to ingest both appetizer and vegetable sides that accompany a main meal.

The researchers of the study insist that too many children eat on the run, often in 10 minutes, obligated to stand in line to lunch. Multiplying the number of waiting lines, having a more efficient canteen staff or a system with automatic pay stations are some of the solutions put forward to better manage the problem

Spending time with the kids

The average number of hours parents spent with their children each week rose since 1985.



Source: Journal of Marriage and Family

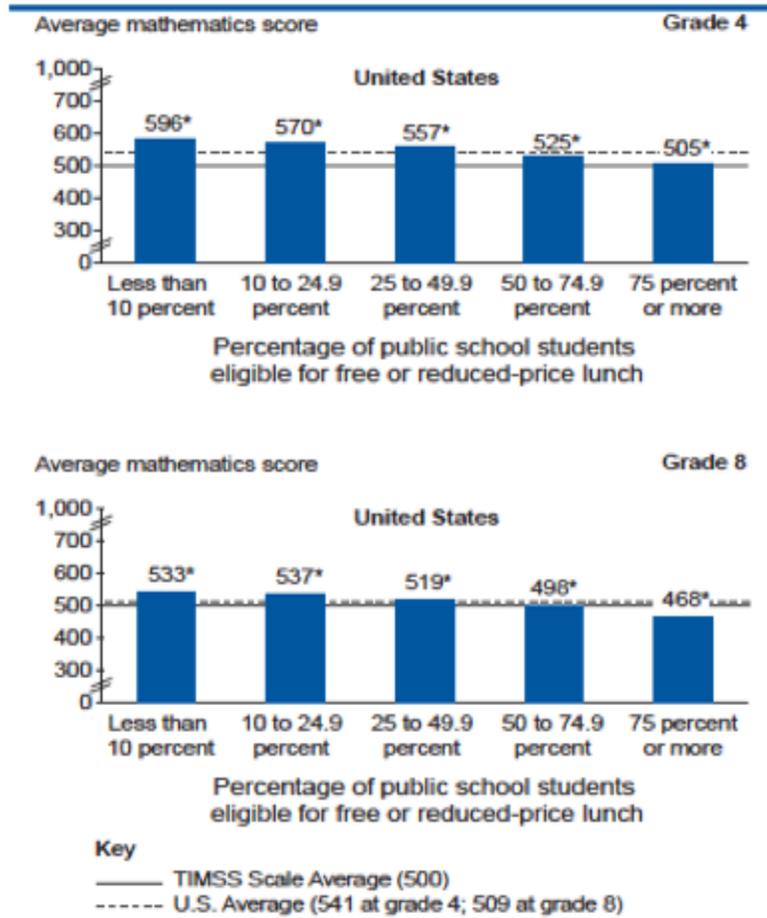
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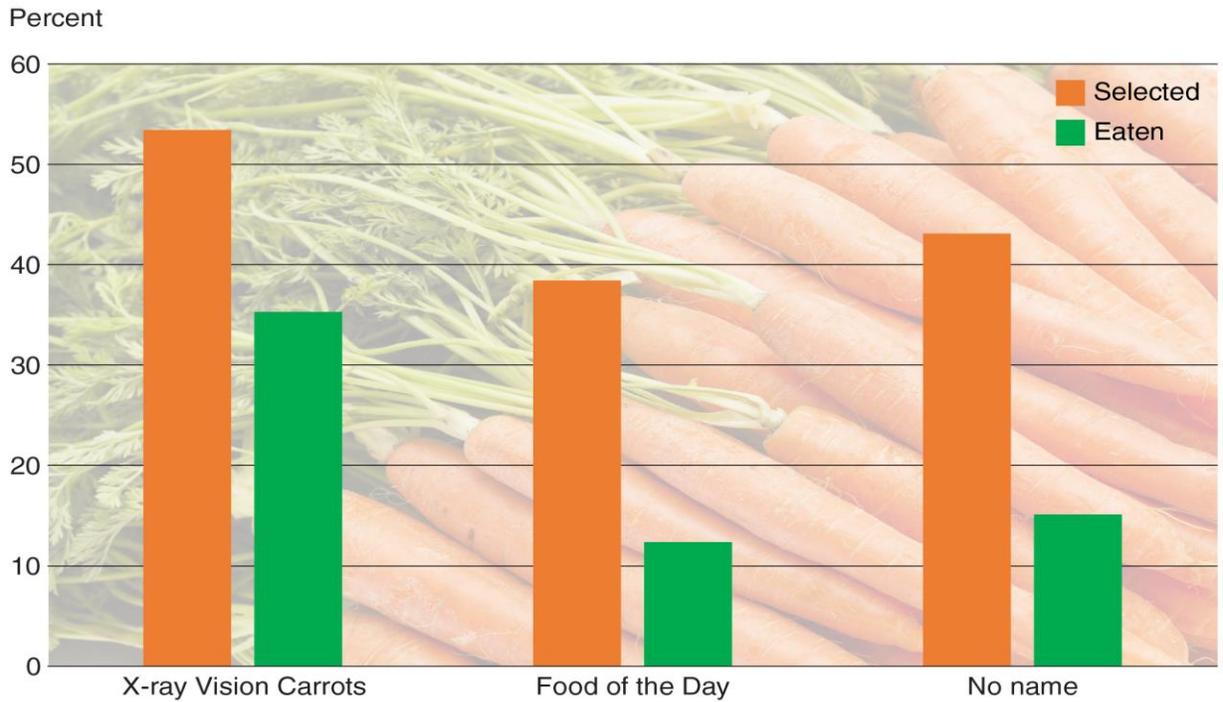
Figure 8. Average mathematics scores of U.S. 4th- and 8th-grade students, by percentage of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch: 2011



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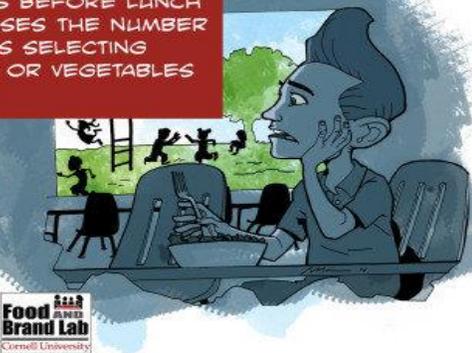
Share of elementary school children selecting and eating carrots



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from Wansink, B; DR Just, CR Payne; MZ Klinger. "Attractive names sustain increased vegetable intake in schools." *Preventive Medicine* 55 (2012) 330-332.

HAVING RECESS BEFORE LUNCH MEANS MORE NUTRITIOUS CHOICES

RECESS BEFORE LUNCH INCREASES THE NUMBER OF KIDS SELECTING FRUITS OR VEGETABLES BY 45%



THE AMOUNT OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES EATEN INCREASES BY 54%