

Children get their healthiest meals from school, study reveals

Researchers found that school meals have higher nutritional quality compared to those from other food sources, such as restaurants.

By [Benita Gingerella](#) on Apr. 13, 2021

School meals have higher nutritional quality compared to meals from other food sources, such as restaurants, [a study](#) led by researchers at The Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University shows.

The study looked at all meals (including snacks and beverages) consumed by nearly 21,000 children and 40,000 adults between 2003 to 2018 and rated their nutritional value using the American Heart Association Diet Score and the [Healthy Eating Index](#).

Its researchers found that meals with the highest nutritional quality came from schools, where only 24% of meals consumed by children were of poor nutritional quality. In comparison, meals with the lowest nutritional quality came from restaurants, where 65% of adults' meals and 80% of children's meals were of poor nutritional quality.

The research team also found that, between 2003 to 2018, the proportion of food with poor nutritional quality consumed from schools was cut by more than half, from 57% to 24%.

"Improvement in schools was especially striking, large and equitable across population subgroups. This is clearly linked to the 2010 Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, a powerful lesson on how a single federal policy can improve both nutrition and equity for millions of Americans," Dariush Mozaffarian, dean of the Friedman School and senior author of the study, said in a statement. "These findings are especially timely with the new focus of the presidential administration, USDA and Congress on nutrition security."



All school meals are free for all students through June 30, 2021