

Suggested Answers to Common Food & Nutrition Questions from Students

Students learn from and model the food and eating beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of adults, friends, peers and many other influences in their lives.

As an educator, you are a key influencer of students. Below are suggested responses to common questions or comments you may hear from your students around nutrition, food and eating to help them: build their knowledge in this topic area, correct misinformation, be respectful of others' food and eating habits and choices, and develop a positive relationship with food and eating for life.

Q. How do you respond when a student tells you that “My _____ (insert grandmother/Dad/friend etc.) says that _____ (insert commonly questioned food here e.g. cookies, chocolate bars, meat, gluten, dairy, processed food) are unhealthy and bad for you?”

Possible response:

- People eat different foods for lots of reasons (e.g. food cost and what's available, foods they're used to eating, how food tastes, what they like to eat, allergies, family culture and traditions).
- What's important is that we each have different foods available to us that we like and that can give us what we need to grow, learn and play.

Q. How do you respond when a student describes a food being discussed in class, offered at school or being eaten by someone else as “gross”?

Possible responses:

- It's OK not to like a food. But think about how you would feel if someone called a food you like to eat “gross” (a good come-back for this is “Don't yuck my yum.”).
- People eat in different ways for different reasons (e.g. food cost and what's available, family culture and tradition, foods they're used to eating, how food tastes, what they like to eat, and allergies).
- Instead, let's say things like “I've never tried that food”, or “I've tried it and I didn't like it”, or “No, thank you, I don't want any”.

Q. When there is no-pop policy in place, how do you respond when a student asks “Why can't we have pop at school?”

Possible Response:

- It's our school's policy to offer water, milk and fortified soy beverages to make it easier for students and staff to get enough of these drinks at school. These drinks can quench our thirst and support us to grow, learn and play.

Q. How do you respond when students tell you they want to go out and play instead of eating their lunch (because they only have XYZ minutes)?

Background context:

It can be hard not to comment when a child is not eating their lunch.

Research shows that pressuring children to eat (including using rewards, describing the health benefits of food, requesting “two more bites” or comparing eating habits) doesn’t work. In fact, pressure to eat can lead to children eating less than they usually would, and it can make it harder for children to accept and like new foods. Rather, schools and educators can focus on setting expectations around meal and snack routines at schools (e.g. when to eat, where to eat, how long students need to stay at their desk before going outside), and ensuring students have a comfortable and pleasant space to eat. Within that structure, students always decide whether, how much and in what order to eat the foods that have been provided to them.

Possible responses to students:

- “That’s your choice. I heard you say yesterday that you were hungry after skipping lunch.”
- “This is your last chance to eat at school today.”
- “I expect all students to stay at their desk for 10 minutes, and then they may go out to play.”

Q. How do you respond when a student shares that they have been told that eating _____ (insert questioned food here e.g. meat, dairy, fish, eggs, packaged foods) is bad for the environment and/or is “not right” (e.g. unethical)?

Possible responses:

- The environment is very important, and science is constantly learning more about how human activities affect the environment. Because of this, people are thinking more about how the foods they eat affect the environment e.g. how the food is grown, the journey the food makes from field to table.
- But food choices and eating habits are complicated, since people eat in different ways for different reasons (e.g. food cost and what’s available, family culture and tradition, what they’re used to and what they like to eat, allergies).
- People make food choices that are possible for them, and no single way of eating can work for everyone.

Q. How do you respond when a student comments that “If you eat too much _____ (insert specified food e.g. food; sugary food; fatty food; fried food; fast food) you will be unhealthy?”

Possible Response:

- No one food, way of cooking or eating makes a body healthy or unhealthy. Food is only one of many things that helps our body grow and develop, such as getting enough sleep, playing and other physical activities, and feeling good about ourselves.

Q. How do you respond when a student asks “Why do some students choose to eat packaged snack foods for lunch or snack instead of the free healthy food offered by the school?”

Possible responses to students:

- Some students may not be familiar with or like the foods offered by the school.
- Different people eat in different ways for lots of reasons (e.g. what’s available to them, foods they’re used to eating, how food tastes, what they like to eat, , family culture and tradition, allergies).
- What’s important is that we each have different foods available to us that we like and that can give us what we need to grow, learn and play.

Q. How do you respond when a student asks “How do I know how much I need to eat?”

Possible responses:

- Our bodies and stomachs naturally know how much we need to eat. Our bodies and stomachs tell us to eat when we are hungry, and to stop eating when we are satisfied. For example, how does your body or stomach tell you when you are hungry? Or when you are full? This is part of why it can help to sit down and make time to eat – so that we can enjoy eating and listen to our bodies and stomachs. Plus, everybody is different and we all need different amounts of food at different times. Some days we may eat more and some days we eat less, and that’s OK.

Q. How do you respond when a student comments that sometimes students bring unhealthy lunches to school?

Possible Response:

- It’s common to hear people talk about food using words such as unhealthy or bad. In our classroom we don’t label foods as unhealthy vs. healthy (or bad vs. good) so we can all enjoy our food.
- People eat in different ways for different reasons (e.g. food cost and what’s available, family culture and tradition, foods they’re used to eating, how food tastes, what they like to eat, and allergies). Each person is unique, and what’s important is that we each have a variety of foods available to us that we like and that can give us what we need to grow, learn and play.

How do you respond when a student asks which type of diet is best for health and weight loss?

Possible Response:

- Bodies naturally come in many shapes and sizes and are mostly decided by the genes we are born with - that’s why each of us is unique. Food is only one of many things that gives our body what it needs to grow, learn and play. For example, getting enough sleep and physical activity, and feeling good about ourselves are also important. Except for special diets to help a medical condition, like allergies, children and youth don’t need to be on a diet.

How do you respond when a student asks “Are smoothies good to have for breakfast every day?”

Possible Response:

- Smoothies sound like a yummy breakfast! What do you like to have in your smoothies? Do you like to eat it in a cup or a bowl?
- Smoothies sound great! There are many different breakfast options that can keep our body and stomach satisfied until our next snack or meal
- What do you think about having smoothies for breakfast everyday? Are there other breakfast foods that you also like?