



Our kids on sick snack-fest

Parents don't always have time to pack school lunchboxes and that's where the tuck shop comes in handy. But do you know what your kids buy or even what goes on at the tuck shop? Read on for some startling revelations

BY MARLIZE LEYDEN

TUCK shops have seldom been a shining example of wholesome, healthy food or snacks. Many of us have memories of buying cool drinks and packets of chips from the tuck shop in our schooldays. Back then, though, our parents had more time and less money so we often went to school with relatively healthy food in our lunchboxes. Today, however, things are different: parents have less time and kids have more money. The result? R50 notes and doughnuts flying back and forth across the tuck shop counter.

Parents dish out the money and the

tuck shops give their kids exactly what they want – and we all know that's *not* carrots and broccoli.

The result? Children are becoming ever fatter and struggling with self-image and concentration in class.

SOME kids spend up to R50 a day at the tuck shop, says Sorinda Fourie, a teacher and the buyer for the tuck shop at a primary school in Musina, Limpopo.

"Pies, Coke and sausage rolls sell out fast. Healthy food doesn't sell at all. Many kids spend R20 a day on sweets and chips and also eat what's in their lunchboxes."



ISTOCKPHOTO

Kids' choices

YOU Pulse gave five children of various ages R20 each to buy lunch at their school tuck shop.

Shikira Gebhardt (7)

- Chicken and mushroom pie from King Pie: R10
- Fanta (330 ml): R6
- Sour-strip sweets: R4

Ben Louw (10)

- Toasted ham and cheese on white: R10
- Coke (330 ml): R6
- A few mixed sweets: R4

Ettiene de Vrye (12)

- Toasted ham and cheese on white: R10
- Fanta (330 ml): R6
- 2 x Cadbury Dairy Milk (treat size – 15 g): R4

Amanda Vorster (17)

- Hot dog: R8
- Energade (500 ml): R8
- Piece of fudge: R4

Shimoré de Vrye (13)

- Hamburger: R10
- Willards Flings (12 g): R4
- Small packet Sugus sweets: R4
- A few mixed sweets: R2

It's so bad tuck shops seldom buy healthy food at all, says Willie O'Kelly, owner of W&Y Foods, a company that supplies school tuck shops and hostels in the Bloemfontein area. "We give our clients the option of healthy food but there's no demand."

Kids don't buy "proper food" from tuck shops, confirms Annelize Venter, a high-school teacher in Postmasburg, Northern Cape. "Sweets, chips, fizzy drinks and ice lollies are popular because they can be consumed quickly during breaks or on the sly in class."

The irony is the kindergarten expects parents to send fruit to school but there's no fruit for sale at the tuck shop, says Nadine van Staden, a Johannesburg mom of two toddlers.

"And those cheap packets of chips full of colorants and preservatives are just

one of the unhealthy snacks for sale."

This comment from Amanda Vorster (17), a Grade 11 learner in Meyerton, Gauteng, says it all, "If you really want to eat healthily you can buy muffins."

It's no wonder almost 17 per cent of South African children are overweight, according to The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa. As we know, overweight kids become overweight adults and South Africans and their offspring are becoming heftier and heftier.

We're the third-fattest nation on the planet and our fat thighs are fast climbing further up that ladder. Research by pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline in 2010 showed 61 per cent of South African adults are overweight or obese. "The Rainbow Nation is literally eating itself to death," the research reveals.

Angelique Biagioni, an educational

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psychologist based in Johannesburg, says four out of 10 kids she sees in her psychology practice are overweight. "This causes serious self-image problems. Snack meals just increase the vicious circle of overweight children and problems with self-esteem."

An additional danger is kids who eat the wrong foods could struggle to concentrate and perform poorly academically. "When a child with concentration issues drinks a fizzy cool drink before a session with me he's uncontrollable," says Lauri Frazer, a Centurion occupational therapist. "I don't even want to think about what a teacher has to face after learners have had this kind of food during first break."

Although children's food education should take place at home, schools should take more responsibility when choosing supplies for their tuck shops, says Corlia Park, a dietician in Vereeniging. "A child is a child. Faced with a choice between an apple and a packet of chips, he'll pick the chips."

Schools should carefully think about the reason for having a tuck shop, she says. "Are they out to make money or are they providing a service for parents who don't have the time to pack lunchboxes? Parents should feel free to insist healthier food should be sold."

Ayesha Seedat, co-ordinator of The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa's snack programme, shares Park's concerns. The Foundation's programme helps schools make snack food healthier. However, schools are sometimes hesitant to join the programme because they are afraid of losing their profits, she says.

She strongly feels a healthy lunchbox from home is still one of the best ways to fight unhealthy snack temptations.

Marie du Preez, a Cape Town mother of a 12-year-old son, agrees. "We don't

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DIETICIAN CORLIA PARK

want to deny schools profits by waging a too-strong campaign against snacks because many schools struggle financially and it's in our children's interests not to make it harder for schools to raise money," she says.

"The answer lies in compromise. Once a week my child is allowed to buy a lunch and something of his own choice at the tuck shop. At the start of the term our school's shop sends out a list of lunches that can be pre-ordered. My son and I choose something together, like a healthy but tasty home-made chicken pie. On the other four days he takes a lunchbox."

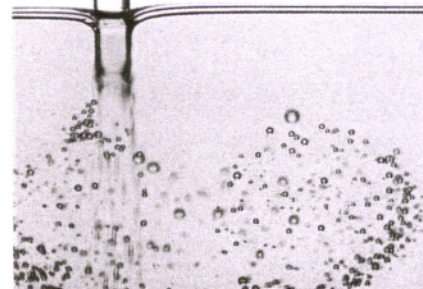
Tuck shops don't have to be banned from stocking snacky things because even popular snacks have counterparts that are just as nice but healthier, Park says.

"Oven-baked chips are much healthier than fries. There are products without colorants and preservatives with low glycaemic indexes and less saturated fat that are just as nice – if not nicer – than their unhealthy counterparts. And such products aren't as expensive as many people believe." ⊕

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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EXTRA SOURCES: THE NUTRITION INFORMATION CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH (NICUS); THE SOUTH AFRICAN GLYCEMIC INDEX AND LOAD GUIDE BY GABI STEENKAMP AND LIESBET DELPORT; HEARTFOUNDATION.CO.ZA



OLIOHUB/ISTOCK

Oil slick

Parents would be shocked to learn about the oil management of some snacks, says Willie O'Kelly of Bloemfontein snack supply company W&Y Foods. "What goes on in some kitchens is scary."

When the same cooking oil is repeatedly used for frying it breaks down and can cause heart disease and cancer, warns Professor Lodewyk Kock of Free State University's department of microbial, biochemical and food biotechnology.

"Good oil management involves using high-quality oils and correct frying techniques. But even if a tuck shop's oil management is good, the same might not be said of its supplier."

Research has shown one in eight fast-food shops misuses oil, Kock says. He is also head of the SA Cooking Oil Initiative, which encourages proper oil management.

There is legislation against oil abuse in food preparation and businesses that break the law can be fined, O'Kelly says. "But it's difficult to monitor properly."

Where to get help

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa supplies free information and guidance on how to make tuck shops healthier. Go to www.heartfoundation.co.za for more information.

A typical tuck-shop snack

TOTAL NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Energy: 5 114 kJ
 Fat: 58,4 g
 Salt: 1 105 mg

Toasted ham and
 cheese on white bread
 Energy 3 757 kJ
 Fat 49,8 g
 Salt 1 070 mg



Fanta (330 ml)
 Energy 703 kJ
 Fat 0 g
 Salt 9 mg

2 Cadbury
 Dairy Milk
 chocolates
 (15 g each)
 Energy 654 kJ
 Fat 8,6 g
 Salt 26 mg

Vereeniging-based dietician Corlia Park analyses the snacks 12-year-old Ettiene de Vrye chose (see previous page).

She says the total energy value of this snack is 5 114 kJ – more than half the total kilojoules a boy of 12 should consume in a day (9 572 kJ).

He's getting double the animal fat (58,4 g) he should in a day (27 g).

The salt in the ham and cheese sandwich alone is 1 070 mg; the daily recommended amount is between 900 and 2 700 mg.

The healthy alternative

TOTAL NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Energy: 2 352 kJ
 Fat: 14 g
 Salt: 772,2 mg

Energy drink
 (300 ml)
 Energy 243 kJ
 Fat 0 g
 Salt 87 mg

1 fruit bar or
 1 piece of fresh fruit
 Energy 400 kJ
 Fat 0 g
 Salt 12,2 mg

2 slices low-GI wholegrain bread
 with lean biltong and avocado
 Energy 1 709 kJ
 Fat 14 g
 Salt 673 mg



The low-GI value supplies sustained energy and fibre so your child won't easily feel tired and the fillings are low in saturated fat but rich in omega-3 fat, which stimulates brain activity. The fruit or fruit bar is a healthy snack alternative with more fibre, vitamins and sustained energy.