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*Listening, learning,  
and living together:  
it's the science of life.*

## **Healthy School Lunches<sup>1</sup>**

*Megan McIntyre and R. Elaine Turner<sup>2</sup>*

As the obesity epidemic in America continues to grow, more of today's youth are struggling with being overweight than ever before. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of overweight children has more than quadrupled since 1970, and 15% of today's children and adolescents are overweight (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006).

Schools are a key setting for healthy nutrition and physical activity strategies and are working with the Department of Agriculture to promote physical activity and nutrition education. Through the USDA's Healthier U.S. School Challenge, schools are recognized for the changes they've made in improving their school nutrition environment, improving the quality of food served, and providing students with healthier, more nutritious choices.

Parents can also play an active role in ensuring that their child is eating healthy school meals. Parents are encouraged to eat breakfast or lunch at school to see firsthand what the meals are like. Visit the school cafeteria to get to know the staff and consider volunteering to organize a tasting party to introduce new and nutritious foods to kids. Work with the school PTA to make sure parents' opinions about healthy food choices are heard. Make sure that your children and teens appreciate how healthy meals influence their mind as well as their body.

1. This document is FAR8027, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published February 2008. In the interest of time or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Megan McIntyre, undergraduate student, and R. Elaine Turner, associate dean, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

School administrators, students and parents can work together to provide meals that promote healthful food choices in our schools.

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### References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006, August 26.) *Defining overweight and obesity*. Retrieved May 7, 2007, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/defining.htm#Adolescents>.

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