

feedback

Our Spring issue was devoted to providing readers with common-sense approaches to making their everyday diets safe, healthy and sustainable. The stories covered a range of topics on promoting, producing and ensuring access to fresh, nutritious food.

From Our Table to Yours

After reading the Spring issue of *h*, I have one recommendation: Reprint copies to distribute widely. At the very least, reprint the pullout. Your stories of local-to-national movements toward healthful eating and living are inspirational, and the lists of farmers' markets, food guides, websites, books and magazines are invaluable resources. As an author (with Dr. Keith Berndtson) of a Prevention Health Book—"The Immune Advantage: The Single Most Important Thing You Can Do For Your Health," Rodale, 2002—I believe strongly in providing easy access to information. The first step toward improved health moves seamlessly into the second if you know what you can do and why.

That's why Dr. David Servan-Schreiber's book "Anticancer: A New Way of Life," which was mentioned in his *h* Q&A interview, became my go-to guide after I was diagnosed with breast cancer last year. He helped me understand how I could improve upon my excellent medical care. For example, I became even more conscientious about my food choices after learning how certain chemical compounds can reduce inflammation and slow down the growth of cancer cells. Granted, I benefited from an astute early diagnosis after a digital mammogram and superb care with the benefit of a targeted drug. But I like having even more control over my health.

With a combination of healthful eating and exercise, I'm banking on a healthy future. Good bet that you'll find me this year at the Rachel Carson Homestead Association's Sustainable Feast at the Rachel Carson Bridge in downtown Pittsburgh.

Ellen Mazo
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The Spring issue of *h* could not be timelier as Congress considers the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. The proposed legislation, which is stalled in the House, is the most aggressive in history. It would address obesity with new nutrition standards to improve the quality of food in schools, regulate indirect expense charges such as utility and waste-removal costs, and support technical improvements in the process of certifying for meals. But, despite congressional public relations efforts to show that lawmakers want to find solutions to childhood obesity and to promote wellness and healthy foods, the bill falls short in funding. Currently, federally supported school food programs are underfunded by 30 cents per meal, and the bill only increases the funding by 6 cents per meal.

The "No More Junk (Food) in the Trunk" article in this special food issue of *h* magazine identifies Pennsylvania's robust attempt to address the problem. Since few schools have voluntarily adopted Pennsylvania's School Nutrition Standards, the state Board of Education will mandate compliance to the updated version in addition to daily physical activity. As director of the Pittsburgh Public Schools' Food Service department, I'm proud that it is one of the few school districts that have embraced School Nutrition Standards (including several "Best Practices") through its wellness policy.

Our menu planning has undergone many subtle changes simultaneously, including limiting salt, sugar, processed foods and high-fructose corn syrup; eliminating fried foods, trans fats, bovine growth hormone, and artificial colors and sweeteners; increasing whole-grains, fiber, whole-muscle meat and vegetarian options; and serving only skim or 1 percent milk (eliminating flavored milks at breakfast). Food Service also has recently taken control of vending machines from schools to ensure compliance with School Nutrition Standards.

Many of these changes reflect how adulterated the U.S. food supply is—among the highest in industrialized countries. I'm happy to see the revolution!

Michael Peck
Food Service Director
Pittsburgh Public Schools

My patient was at the office for his routine well-child visit this summer. To the surprise of both the child and his parent, his growth chart revealed this his weight percentile was significantly greater than his height percentile for his age, placing his body mass index, or BMI, in the obese range. Unfortunately, his situation has become all too common among school-age children here in Pennsylvania and across the country. Families perceive that their child is no different than the norm.

In our fast-paced society, busy work and activity schedules often preclude preparation of a well-balanced breakfast or dinner-time meal. Many families will resort to serving quickly prepared processed or fast foods. Additionally, impoverished families may not be able to afford healthier fresh produce. At school, lunches or vending machines frequently offer students poor dietary choices that are high in unhealthy fats and sugars.

The proposed Pennsylvania state legislation that would require schools to provide healthy food choices in cafeterias and vending machines in addition to 30 minutes of exercise each school day is an important first step to help children learn to lead healthier lives now and in their futures. Without such first steps, we will only continue to see a decline in the health and longevity of future generations.

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