

WHIZMEAL AS FEATURED ON ST MIND YOUR BODY, 7 MAY 2015

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ABOUT WHIZMEAL

We are a Singapore-based technology start-up innovating at the intersection of school meals, nutrition and parent-child engagement.



Giving your child a healthy break

A new online food-ordering service helps parents make sure their children eat nutritious school meals



JOYCE TEO

Principal of West Spring Primary, Mrs Jacinta Lim.

HOW THE PROGRAMME WORKS

Before launching the programme, Whizmeal worked with the four stallholders at West Spring Primary to craft healthier meals it could offer online.

The stallholders were educated on the Health Promotion Board's (HPB) healthy-eating guidelines. They were also advised on menu-planning and cost considerations, said Madam Tan, who was a canteen stall operator for eight years – first at a private school and then at a primary school.

Stallholders are sold on the new concept, mainly due to income predictability, she said.

They do not pay a cent and get advance orders, which helps them with their shopping and budgeting. They are also paid a month in advance.

Parents pay \$15 for a yearly subscription. They then order and pay for the food online a month ahead.

They print and cut out the meal coupons for their children to collect the food at the stalls.

Parents have a choice of non-halal, halal and vegetarian meals. The nutritional content of the dishes is provided, except for food that is not prepared by the stallholders, which includes snacks.

Pupils who are not on the programme buy from the stallholders directly. They have a choice of typical canteen dishes, such as pasta and mee sotu, but these may not be balanced meals. Snacks, such as corn chips, are available as well.

The school's canteen does not sell soft drinks, said Mrs Lim. Once a week, pupils eat a different fruit in class with the teacher, with the aim of exposing them to a variety of fruits.

Still, medical technologist Adriana Ismail was worried that her son, Muhammad Aniq Anarji Mohdhar



A participating pupil of the Whizmeal programme at West Spring Primary presenting a coupon to a stallholder in exchange for a healthy meal.

ST PHOTOS: TIFFANY GOH

COVER STORY

There are no soft drinks for sale at West Spring Primary School's canteen.

Many stallholders may simply look for the cheapest way of feeding the children as they do not know what is healthy food, added Ms Edina Hong, marketing director of the Emmanuel Stroobant group of restaurants.

Indeed, many canteen vendors do not have a good understanding of healthy eating.

"Canteen vendors and cooks may not have experience or sufficient knowledge in preparing meals which incorporate healthier ingredients," said the HPB spokesman.

That is why HPB's programme includes culinary training, which provides them with tips on preparing those ingredients.

Schools also need to believe in healthy eating and parents need to support what the school is trying to achieve, Mr Stroobant said.

To some extent, such an initiative may need to be subsidised, as fresh ingredients tend to cost more, he said.

At Stamford American, a three-course meal with lasagne or a burger costs as much as \$9, compared with less than \$2 for a plate of chicken rice in a primary school.

"The difference from what is offered in eateries is in the preparation method. While we have burgers, we do not buy premade meat patties.

"We buy the beef, mince them and incorporate chopped vegetables into the meat so that the children will get their much-needed fibre."

Gourmet caterer Preparazi, which provides meals for a childcare centre in a prime residential district, also

uses fresh ingredients. It does not use MSG, additives or palm oil, said its chef-owner Jeremy Nguekuek. Rates, but said cost may not be as big as a barrier as some perceive it to be.

"As young children do not eat much, an increase of less than \$1 in the daily budget means chicken breast instead of sausages, prawns instead of crab sticks and brown rice and fresh vegetables."

Many parents would pay that extra \$30 a month for better food at childcare centres. However, they are not given that opportunity, he said.

"If it were up to me, I'd place school fees separately from the daily meal provision budget – parents will see how much is set aside for their children's meals. I think the amount that is set aside for food, out of the total school fees, will be shocking for many of them."

Of course, the other barrier is the adults' mindset, said Mr Nguekuek.

"I think we severely underestimate children. We pigeonhole them as narrow-minded people who like only certain foods," he said.

There are food outlets which sell children's meals that consist of only deep-fried chicken nuggets and a packet of Ribena, he pointed out.

"It seems to me that it's not the children who need help, but the adults who need to be more educated about nutrition and to be armed with more ideas on how to cook healthier dishes for children."

Facebook

committee of my kid's school, emphasise the importance of healthy eating. Deep-fried food and sweet stuff are not sold at the schools should not.

Also Adele

I do not allow my children to buy from the school canteen. My girls take with them filtered water and packed food. We do not drink cream or pasteurised milk. My daughter is 10. What they don't know will surprise you.

Facebook

Any G Lim with a \$50 shopping voucher for the best meal (name, address, phone number and contact number to WhatsApp: 9799 1111) on Facebook in the next 24 hours.

Give your kids healthy meals in school? Just click




HEALTHY meals are on the menu in more school canteens. A new start-up, Whizmeal, allows parents to order and pay for their primary school children's healthy meals online, so they know exactly what they are eating during recess.

Today's Mind Your Body looks at how efforts are being made out and what more could be done to boost nutrition in schools.

Also, mishandling food at home can lead to food poisoning. Experts list the common pitfalls, from hiring raw meat carelessly to using bleach to in the kitchen.

If you are travelling up the mountains, a Chinese called roseroot may be able to help you ward off altitude sickness.

Learn how to make boring tofu exciting, by dressing it up with a simple miso glaze.