



Candy, soft drinks might be junked

By Mary Jo Howe

Vending machine food may be convenient for UNL students on the run, but about all it's good for is cavities and a few extra pounds around the middle, said Teresa Schaeffer, assistant professor of food and nutrition.

As a result, the Student Dietetic Association has requested that the Canteen Vending Co. replace the junk food in machines with more nutritious snacks.

All vending machines at UNL are run by the Canteen Vending Co.

"It's really embarrassing to see the kinds of food available in our own Food and Nutrition building," Schaeffer said.

The Student Dietetic Association has suggested that foods such as dried fruits, milk, fruit juices, and seeds replace the candy, soft drinks and salted snacks.

But most of these items are perishable, Schaeffer said, and there is a possible product loss for the company if the food does not sell well.

Most junk food is not harmful, Schaeffer said, but it can be if it replaces more nutritional food and unbalances the student's diet.

Some sodium products, such as potato chips may be harmful to people with heart problems, she said.

The Dental College also is concerned that the foods are not good for teeth, she said. Because students don't brush their teeth during the day, there is a good environment for tooth decay, she said.

Gene Meerkatz, UNL Vending System Manager and Richard Bradley, Dean of the College of Dentistry are investigating the vending machine issue.

According to Don Carlson, Canteen Vending Co.

representative, the vending company has made efforts to stock the machines with raisins, almonds, peanuts, granola bars and diet soft drinks. But the products didn't sell well, Carlson said.

The vending company currently is stocking cheese and crackers, almonds, peanuts, peanut butter and crackers and beer nuts in some vending machine areas, Carlson said.

Through experiments, the company has found that some items sell well in one building but not in another, Carlson said. That is why one might find raisins in the vending machines at CBA but not at Ferguson Hall, he said.

Every vending machine station must generate enough profit to support itself, he said. The station cannot be paid for from profits from another station.

They are considering having all sugar-based drinks removed and replaced with diet soda, and all candy removed and replaced with nuts, raisins, and other nutritious items, Meerkatz said.

"From the past experiments, the company found that when students are given the options between a nutritious item and a junk food item, they buy the junk food," Meerkatz said.

"Now we're going to see what happens when the option is removed. Maybe the products won't sell at all," he said.

Schaeffer said she believes that students are becoming more nutrition conscious. She said there have been more non-majors in her nutrition courses in the past two years.

Students seem to be more aware of what they put in their bodies, as well as being concerned about getting something for their money.

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