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Market healthy for school lunches

Parents sample variety of healthful options for children



Elizabeth McDonald of Washington, left, questions a Naturally Yours grocery store employee about the contents of some food she is sampling. The grocery store teamed up with Options Center for Health and Education on a healthy lunch tasting party.

PEORIA HEIGHTS – Packing a school lunch becomes a much bigger challenge when the student has food allergies.

So when Helen Cox, director of the Options Center for Health and Education, read an article about the variety of healthful foods geared toward kids on the market, she called Naturally Yours grocery in Peoria's Metro Centre. The two paired up to bring parents a lunch-tasting party hosted by Options Center with food provided bit the grocery store.

Soy cheese sandwiches and soy peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on wheat and gluten-free breads, pretzels, cookies, soy mild, cereal, turkey sticks and yogurt were sampled by guests while store employees answered questions about the foods' contents.

Julie Gillfillan of Spring Bay has two boys, both of whom have a condition that

requires a strictly monitored diet. Sugar and gluten, a wheat product, are off-limits. "It's hard when you send them to school and you're not there," she said.

Elizabeth McDonald of Washington came with an eye toward her own diet as well as her grandchildren's. "I'm always looking for something without wheat, without sugar," she said. "There's just a lot of things I can't have and I'm looking for something else."

Donna Bolen, manager of Naturally Yours, has seen a definite move to do more for children with special diets. "Seven years ago it was few and far between what those kids could have," Bolen said. "Those kids feel left out."

"Now, not only are there a variety of tasty products made without many of the foods that trigger allergies in children, those foods are attractively packaged so the kids will want to eat them," she said.

"The kids see the monkey on the package and they want that cereal," Bolen said.