

**BusinessWeek**

**Bloomberg  
Businessweek**

Eating Healthy The European Way

*This article was originally published in "Working Parents" on May 14, 2007*

I'm spending a few months in Geneva, Switzerland, where I grew up, and as always, I'm amazed at the healthy eating habits of people here, children included.

It is not just that people eat wholesome food; it's that they seem to do it so naturally, with no fanfare and no particular thought. In supermarkets, families happily load their carts with yogurts, cheese, bread, and fruit. At the school gate, mothers picking up their kids hand over ham sandwiches (made with lots of butter and thick slices of bread), bananas, and tomatoes, all of which kids wash down with a tetrapak of full-fat milk.

As you enter my childrens' school, you deposit fruits in a big wicker basket near the front door. Later in the morning, a lovely lady named Caroline slices the bananas, apples, kiwis, and mangoes and arranges the pieces artistically on large ceramic plates. Caroline also slices several loaves of different kinds of bread, which the children can have along with the fruit for their mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks. No one questions it, no one asks for anything else. It's just part of the course.

But even as healthy eating here seems entrenched in daily life, people also don't either make a big deal about their children eating pastries, cakes, and sweets -- things that many parents I knew in the U.S. would be loathe to serve their families.

When I lived in the States, I used to listen to my neighbors boast about how their children never ate refined sugar, about how they made cakes with applesauce and totally forbade things like potato chips. I didn't dare admit that my kids ate chips pretty often and that I hated cakes made with applesauce.

Here in Europe, I don't feel embarrassed that my kids often eat two "Dannette au chocolat" puddings a day. We have been invited to peoples' houses and served chocolate cake, chips, and Coke Zero. And every afternoon, we join the other mothers at the drugstore across the street to buy some Malabar bubble gum.

Despite these indulgences, all the kids I see around me look healthy, and I really think it's because their parents just have a more casual approach to eating. I feel that both parents and their children would benefit more if eating were a more unconscious, effortless process the way it is in Europe, and not such a carefully thought out, planned science with strict dos and don'ts. – *Savita Iyer*