

SERVE KIDS BETTER™.

[INSERT DECISION MAKER NAME], are you going to serve kids better™?

[INSERT DECISION MAKER NAME], what's on the restaurant kids' menu for [STATE]'s children this evening? Healthy foods like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables? Hardly. Thousands of children across the state will eat foods that are high in fat, sugar, sodium and calories, and *low* in nutrition. Most restaurants in our state make unhealthy food the default and even market it directly to children, making it nearly impossible for parents to reinforce healthy eating habits when going out to eat.

What's more, families are eating out more than ever these days, given our busy schedules and the growing affordability of restaurant meals. Eating out, which used to be a rare treat, has become a daily necessity:

- Americans now spend more of their food budgets on foods prepared outside the home than for foods at home.ⁱ
- Children consume about a quarter of their calories from eating out, and about 42 percent of children aged 2–9 eat fast food on a given day.^{ii,iii}

Given their growing role in families' diets, restaurants should do their part to *support* families and help make sure all of us—especially children—have healthy options. Unfortunately, it's a responsibility most rarely live up to:

- Approximately 96 percent of entrees in U.S. chain restaurants fail to meet basic USDA nutrition standards, a 2013 report found.^{iv}
- A study of the top 50 U.S. chain restaurants found that 86 percent of children's meal combinations are too high in calories, 55 percent are too high in saturated fat, and 66 percent are too high in sodium.^v
- In 2013, an independent study documented that only 11 of 4,695 possible children's meal combinations in fast food chain restaurants met all of the established nutritional criteria for pre-schoolers, and only 19 meals met all nutritional criteria for older children.^{vi}
- Studies link eating out more with obesity, higher amounts of body fat, and higher body mass index. They also show that eating fast food meals often is associated with consuming more calories and saturated fat.^{vii}

In fact, children eat almost twice as many calories when they eat a meal at a restaurant than they do when they eat a meal at home.^{viii} When I read these stats, I'm thankful that it's not just up to restaurants to turn things around. As a leader, you can help, too. By enacting policies that ensure that families have access to healthy restaurant kids' meals, you can play a vital role in helping our kids get the healthy food they need to grow up strong. **So don't delay, start serving our kids better today through [insert policy priority] that ensure restaurants serve healthier food.**

Since 2008, the percent of restaurant kids' meals that meet the expert nutrition standards has only increased from 1 percent to 3 percent.^{ix} That's not enough. Our children need healthy options now!

SOURCES

- ⁱ *Decoding Consumers in a Challenging Economy*. National Restaurant Association, 2012. Available at: <http://www.restaurant.org/forecast>.
- ⁱⁱ Wootan, Margo G. *Children's Meals in Restaurants: Families Need More Help To Make Healthy Choices*. Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2012. Available at: <http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/Kids-meal-article-Lets-Move.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Lin B and Morrison RM. Food and Nutrient Intake Data: Taking a Look at the Nutritional Quality of Foods Eaten at Home and Away From Home. *Amber Waves* 10.2 (2012): 1-2. Available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/783958/Datafeature.pdf>.
- ^{iv} Sturm R and Wu H. *What's on the Menu? A review of the energy and nutritional content of US chain restaurant menus*. The Rand Corporation, 2013. Available at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP201200113.html.
- ^v Bata da A, Wootan MG. *Kids' Meals II: Obesity and Poor Nutrition on the Menu*. Center for Science in the Public Interest. Available at: <http://www.cspinet.org/kidsmeals2>.
- ^{vi} Harris JL, Schwartz MB, et al. *Fast Food F.A.C.T.S. 2013: Measuring Progress in Nutrition and Marketing to Children and Teens*. Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, 2013. Available at: http://www.fastfoodmarketing.org/media/FastFoodFACTS_Report.pdf.
- ^{vii} Center for Science in the Public Interest. Research Review: Effects of Eating Out on Nutrition and Body Weight. Center for Science in the Public Interest: Washington, DC, 2008.
- ^{viii} Zoumas-Morse C, Rock CL, Sobo EJ, et al. "Children's Patterns of Macronutrient Intake and Associations with Restaurant and Home Eating." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 101(8): 923-925, 925, 2001.
- ^{ix} Bata da A, Wootan MG. *Kids' Meals II: Obesity and Poor Nutrition on the Menu*. Center for Science in the Public Interest. Available at: <http://www.cspinet.org/kidsmeals2>.