

Too Many Calories in Children's Meals

By Rebecca Morley, MA



Several restaurants said they are considering adding lower-calorie items to their kids' menus. The National Restaurant Association, representing 945,000 restaurants, responded that "exercising parental responsibility is key to childhood nutrition" and that "good eating habits and healthy living must be established in the home."

However, citing evidence that dining out accounts for roughly one-third of children's daily caloric intake, CSPI Nutrition Policy Director Margo G. Wootan said "parents want to feed their children healthy meals, but America's chain restaurants are setting parents up to fail."

Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) reports conclude that the majority of children's meals offered at our nation's top restaurant chains are too high in calories. According to the Institute of Medicine, children aged 4 to 8 should consume only about 430 calories per meal. But 93 % of the 1,474 children's meal combinations offered at the 13 restaurants surveyed exceeded that recommendation.

Furthermore the report found that 45 percent of children's meals exceeded recommendations for saturated and trans-fats. 86 percent were high in sodium. CSPI notes that some restaurants are adjusting their menus to give children and their parents healthier options. Two-thirds of Subway's kids' meals, for example, contain 430 calories or less. Subway also is the only chain that does not offer soft drinks with kids' meals. In many chains, 1% or skim milk can be substituted for soda, a big boost for kid's nutrition.

Source: Lowy, [AP/Boston Globe](#), 8/4/08 & Center for Science in the Public Interest [release](#), 8/4/08).

To increase families' access to healthy food, the report recommends that restaurants reformulate their menu items to reduce calorie, fat and sodium content; make fruit, vegetables and 1% or skim milk or water default sides for children's meals instead of french fries or soda; and post nutrition information with menus to help parents make better-informed selections for their children.

