

Eating Out at Restaurants With Children and Teens

Today's children are increasingly eating food away from home, including eating at full-service and fast-food restaurants. Concerns have been raised that this increase in eating at fast-food restaurants has taken place at the same time as the increase in obesity across the country.

A recent study in the journal found that consuming food from a fast-food restaurant was associated with an increase in 126 total calories for children and 310 daily calories for adolescents for that day. Consuming food from a regular full-service restaurant was associated with an increase of 160 calories for children and 267 calories for adolescents. So this means that, compared with a meal at home, eating at either a fast-food restaurant or a regular full-service restaurant means an increase in calories each day that kids eat out. This study also showed that eating a meal at a restaurant was associated with a higher intake of sugar, fat, and sodium, particularly when eating at a fast-food restaurant.

There are several factors that make fast-food access easy for children and adolescents. Fast-food restaurants are often located in a higher density near schools, particularly near high schools and those in low-income neighborhoods. Having a fast-food restaurant near a high school has been linked to increased obesity.



WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Parents have several options to help their kids and teens eat healthy, balanced meals:

- Support local policies to limit the number of fast-food restaurants allowed near your schools. Some cities have banned fast-food outlets near schools.
- Children and teens who view fast-food advertisements on television have had higher rates of fast-food consumption and are at increased risk of obesity. Parents can limit their children's television exposure so that they see less of these advertisements. Parents can also discuss these advertisements with their children and explain what they mean and what they are trying to sell.
- Parents can be aware that, when eating at a restaurant, that portion sizes are likely to be too big for your child. Consider sharing an entrée or taking food home.
- Many restaurants have healthy options:
 - Consider a veggie burger instead of a super-sized burger with lots of sauces.
 - Consider grilled chicken instead of breaded or fried.
 - Consider water instead of soda.
 - Consider a vegetable side or baked potato instead of French fries.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/nutrition/Pages/Healthy-and-Unhealthy-Choices-at-Fast-Food-Restaurants.aspx>

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