

Making over Restaurant Kids' Meals

Making Healthy Choices Easier for Parents and Kids

Restaurants that offer children's menus typically serve refillable sugary drinks like sodas and fruit punch with their advertised kids' meals. Parents often have to pay extra in order to get a healthy drink for their child. Restaurants should do more to make healthy choices more available to families by offering 100% juice, bottled water and low-fat milk as part of the bundled menu price. Nothing in this proposal would prevent a parent from substituting a soda or fruit punch if they so desired. Parents should get to make the drink choice for their young children, not restaurants.

Why is this bill necessary (see back for more)?

- Sugary drinks contribute more calories and added sugars to our diets than any other food or beverage and daily consumption is strongly linked to higher childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes rates (Institute of Medicine, 2012).
- Families "eat out" more than ever. The restaurant industry's share of the national food dollar grew from 25% in 1955 to 47% in 2013 (National Restaurant Association, 2014).
- Every day, 33% of children and 41% of teens consume fast food (Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, Fast Food Facts, 2013).
- Only 3% of kids' meal combinations met the food industry's own revised CFBAI nutrition standards or the National Restaurant Association's Kids LiveWell standards (Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, Fast Food Facts, 2013).
- For each additional day a week that a child eats a fast food meal, the odds of being a daily consumer of sugary drinks increases by 50% (2012 Howard County Sixth Grade Student Health Survey, in press).
- Drinking just one 8-oz sugary drink per day increases a child's odds of becoming obese by 60% (Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, 2012).
- Subway and McDonalds recently announced that they will now advertise and offer healthier drinks as a part of their kids' meals (Washington Post, 2014 and Ad Age, 2013).
- 72% of consumers say that they would be more likely to visit a restaurant that offers healthful options (National Restaurant Association, 2014).
- The Institute of Medicine attributes 20% of the nation's weight gain between 1977 and 2007 to consumption of sugary drinks, including regular soda, sugar-added juices, flavored waters and teas, sports drinks, and energy drinks (Institute of Medicine, 2011).
- Almost 20% of Maryland teens report drinking at least one soda every day (CDC, 2013).
- Soft drinks are the most common kids' meal beverage, offered by 78% of top chain restaurants. The next most frequent beverage offerings are fruit juice (58%) and whole milk (43%) (Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2013).

More Reasons Why Serving Healthy Drinks in Kids' Meals is Important

- Today, children consume 25% of their daily calories (more than 250 total calories) at fast-food and sit-down restaurants (Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2013).
- Studies demonstrate that people are more likely to select the default option rather than request an alternative; therefore, establishing healthy beverage defaults would likely substantially increase the consumption of healthy beverages among children who eat kids' meals (Childhood Obesity Journal, 2013).
- After Disney established healthy beverage options for its kids' meals, two-thirds of parents chose the healthier beverage rather than requesting a different option (Walt Disney Company, 2013).

More Reasons Why We Should Take Actions Like This

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 32% of Maryland children aged 2-5 are overweight or obese (CDC, 2013).
- Children from lower-income homes, Black (non-Hispanic), and Hispanic children are more likely to be overweight or obese than White (non-Hispanic) children (CDC, 2013).
- Recent studies have shown the importance of preventing obesity in young children. Those who enter kindergarten obese or overweight are likely to remain at an unhealthy weight through adolescence (New England Journal of Medicine, 2013).
- Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight adults. This increases to 80 percent if 1 or both parents are overweight or obese (American Heart Association, 2012).
- The number of teens being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and pre-diabetes nationally has grown from 9% in 1999 to 23% in 2008 (Pediatrics: The Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012).

Want healthy kids? Join with Sugar Free Kids Maryland to make a difference. Join us at www.sugarfreekidsmd.org. Call Robi Rawl at (410) 274-2156 or email her at rrawl@medchi.org if you have any questions.