Have Kids’ Meals Become Healthier? Progress and Public Relations

Marlene B. Schwartz, Ph.D.
Director

November 5, 2013

Presentation at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA
Presenter Disclosures

Marlene Schwartz
No relationships to disclose
Children request fast food

• 89% of parents report taking their child to a fast food restaurant at least once the past week
• No longer a “special treat”
• 49% of parents - child asks to go to McDonald’s at least once a week
• 15% of preschoolers ask to go McDonald’s every day
Has nutrition improved?

- Calculated nutrition quality to evaluate change in kids’ meals between February 2010 & February 2013.

McDonald’s  Wendy’s  Burger King  Sonic
KFC  Subway  Taco Bell  Dairy Queen
What changed

- Added healthy beverages
- Added healthy sides
- Increased number of kids’ meal combinations by 54%
- But still don’t meet nutrition standards
Kids’ meal combinations: Met preschool-age nutrition criteria

- 2010
  - 12 of 3,039 kids’ meal combinations (.4%) met all preschool nutrition criteria.
- 2013
  - 11 of 4,695 kids’ meal combinations (.2%) met all preschool nutrition criteria.
Kids’ meal combinations: Met elementary-age nutrition criteria

- 2010
  - 15 of 3,039 kids’ meal combinations (.5%) met all elementary nutrition criteria.

- 2013
  - 19 of 4,695 kids’ meal combinations (.4%) met all elementary nutrition criteria.
Percent of kids’ meal combinations that meet standards (2013)

- Subway
- Burger King
- Sonic
- Wendy's
- McDonald's
- KFC
- Taco Bell
- DQ

- CFBAI
- Kids LiveWell
- IOM elementary
- IOM preschool

Percent that met criteria

0%  20%  40%
What did not change

- 97% do not meet CFBAI new uniform category specific standards
- 97% do not meet Kids Live Well
- Main dish items remained the least nutritious component of most kids’ meals.

- Why? No whole grains, no vegetables, high levels of saturated fat, sodium, and sugar and low fiber
What doesn’t work

- Introduce lots of options
- Set standards that only need to be met by one option

What does work?

- Healthy defaults
July 26, 2011 - McDonald’s changed the default side options for its kids’ meal to include a smaller portion of fries in the Happy Meal and a portion of apples in all kids’ meals (Happy Meal and Mighty Kids’ Meal).

No changes to default drink option.

Also in July 2011, Burger King said that soft drinks and fries were no longer the default options (L.A. Times, 2011)
Evaluation of McDonald’s change in default sides

- **Hypothesis**: The new default sides will significantly increase the proportion of children receiving fruit with a McDonald’s kids’ meal.

- **Methods**: Cross-sectional study utilizing online questionnaire. Data collected in 2010 & 2013. Pre and post McDonald’s 2011 change in default sides.
McDonald’s Kids’ Meal Side Item Selections in 2010 and 2013

* p-value < .05
Sales Practices Audit

- Comparison 2010 & 2013
- 200 restaurants national sample
  - 50 each: McDonald’s, Burger King, Wendy’s, Subway
- Field personnel request children’s meal
  - Hamburger / roast beef sandwich
- Side and beverage provided automatically
- If given a choice, bought the first item offered
Healthy Default Side

- McDonald's
- Burger King
- Wendy's
- Subway
Offered Healthy Side

Year 2010 2013
McDonald's 40% 90%
Burger King 10% 20%
Wendy's 0% 10%
Subway 20% 30%

- **Offered healthy side**
- **Healthy default**
Unhealthy Default Side

- **McDonald's**
- **Burger King**
- **Wendy's**
- **Subway**

- **Offered healthy side**
- **Unhealthy default**
- **Healthy default**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>McDonald's</th>
<th>Burger King</th>
<th>Wendy's</th>
<th>Subway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Offered Unhealthy Side

- **McDonald's**
- **Burger King**
- **Wendy's**
- **Subway**

- Offered unhealthy side
- Offered healthy side
- Unhealthy default
- Healthy default
Healthier Default Beverage

- McDonald's
- Burger King
- Wendy's
- Subway
Offered Healthier Beverage

- McDonald's
- Burger King
- Wendy's
- Subway

- Offered healthier beverage
- Healthier Default
Offered Unhealthy Beverage

- Offered unhealthy beverage
- Offered healthier beverage
- Healthier Default

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>McDonald's</th>
<th>Burger King</th>
<th>Wendy's</th>
<th>Subway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unhealthy Default Beverage

- Offered unhealthy beverage
- Offered healthier beverage
- Unhealthy Default
- Healthier Default

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McDonald's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burger King</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations

• Every restaurant should offer healthy sides, beverages and main dishes in kids’ meals
• These should be the default
• The majority of possible kids’ meal combinations should meet industry standards
For lists of the best and worst meals and interactive tools for parents:

Fastfoodmarketing.org
Acknowledgements

Thank you to Maia Hyary, Sai Liu, and Lindsey Wahlstrom for their assistance in collecting and analyzing the data and preparing this presentation.
Thank you

Marlene.Schwartz@yale.edu

Fastfoodmarketing.org
YaleRuddCenter.org