

Dining out: keeping health on the menu

Most fast foods and restaurant kids menus are high in saturated fat, sugar and salt and low in nutrients needed for growth and development. These types of foods contribute to overweight and give children the wrong messages about eating. The Children's Nutrition Survey revealed children are not eating enough fruit and vegetables for good health. Fruit and vegetables are rich in vitamins and minerals and full of health protecting agents such as antioxidants and fibre.

To help children develop good eating habits make fruit and vegetables a normal part of every meal. Children don't need to choose from specially designed 'kids menus' which are often nothing more than fat laden chicken nuggets and chips. Instead ask your restaurant for a child sized meal off the main menu.

Super-size fast foods are they really a good deal?

Big portions provide more than your child needs and encourages them to eat until they feel stuffed, not just satisfied which may lead to weight problems. With big portions children lose their natural ability to follow hunger signals and their appetite. Soft drinks should be saved for special occasions and are not an everyday food.

Dining out tips:

- Ask for a child sized meal off the main menu if there is nothing nutritious on the kids menu. Why should we feed our children junk?
- Select pasta dishes with tomato based sauces instead of creamy ones
- Ask for a baked potato or bread instead of fries
- Sauces, dressings, butter and sour cream are best served on the side so you can control how much you eat
- If having fries choose wedges instead of thin chips and go easy on the sour cream!
- Choose burgers with added vegetables such as beetroot, tomato, onions, pineapple, lettuce and without fries
- Pizza with vegetables, light on cheese
- Souvlaki or kebabs
- Rice and noodle based takeaways
- Nachos or tortillas with beans, salad and a sprinkling of cheese
- Ask for crumbed fish instead of battered. If having as a takeaway, serve at home with bread and coleslaw or salad. Finish with a piece of fruit or yoghurt for a quick and easy nutritious family meal.
- The best drinks for children are water and lower fat milk. Soda water with fruit juice or a fruit smoothie are fun alternatives.
- Fruit based desserts are a better choice such as fruit salad or a banana split with ice cream (leave off the cream!)

Healthy Nibbles Nutrition & physical activity information for primary schools

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