



Nutrition for Family Living

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February, 2012 Topics

Fast Food – Good, Bad or Indifferent?

Comparing Nutrition Policies at Childcare Centers and Role Modeling of Healthy Eating Behaviors by Caregivers

Resources added to the WNEP/FLP resource database

Fast Food – Good, Bad, or Indifferent?

By Susan Nitzke

Eating at fast food restaurants can be consistent with a healthful diet, especially if it is an occasional practice with careful food and beverage choices (e.g., having smaller portions of calorie-dense items, ordering grilled chicken sandwiches or salads with low-calorie dressings, selecting fresh fruit for a side dish, and ordering low-fat milk, 100% fruit juice or water instead of sodas or shakes). However, recent research shows that in practice choosing to eat at fast food restaurants is likely to be inconsistent with healthy food choices as recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Fulkerson and colleagues from the University of Minnesota examined the associations between weight status and family food dinners away from home in a sample of 723 adolescents and parents. They also collected blood samples from about half of the teen participants. About 2/3 of the families reported eating meals together as a family 3-6 times per week and about half of the families had a family meal from a fast food, restaurant or take-out source at least once in the previous week. Parents and adolescents were more likely to be overweight or obese when their families ate dinner away from home at least once in the week before the data collection. In addition, the percent of body fat, a metabolic risk score and levels of blood insulin were greater for families that purchased at least one fast food dinner in the previous week. Similar findings were reported for take-out dinners.

Anderson et al from the Michigan Department of Community health used 12 questions about fast food from the 2005 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFSS, a telephone survey of adults) to examine how fast food consumption related to obesity prevalence. About 80% of the adults in Michigan went to fast food restaurants at least once a month and 28% reported eating fast food twice a week or more. Frequent visits to fast food restaurants were more prevalent among younger adults, especially young males, but were not statistically related to income, education, race or urban residence. The most prevalent reason for eating fast food was convenience and only 16% said they used nutrition information when ordering. The prevalence of obesity was 24% for adults who went to fast food restaurants less than once a week and 33% for those going to fast food places three times per week or more often.



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A study by Duffey et al examined the associations of visits to fast food and sit-down restaurants with weight and biological/blood measures in a sample of 3,643 young adults (ages 25-42) who are part of a long-term multi-site “CARDIA” study of coronary artery disease risk that started in the 1980s. When they divided the participants from the latest data collection time-point (2005-6) into four equal-size groups (quartiles) according to frequency of fast food consumption, they found that the high-consumption group were heavier, had bigger waist circumference, and had unfavorable changes in some blood measures of heart disease risk. The apparent negative consequences of frequent fast food consumption were weaker or absent in the data regarding frequency of visits to sit-down restaurants/cafeterias.

Implications for Extension Educators. Although many parents and caregivers appreciate the nutritional benefits to home-prepared family meals, they often find themselves resorting to meals that are eaten at, or brought home from, fast food places. Educational programs have a potential to help parents make meaningful improvements in their family’s nutrition if they 1) help parents make realistic plans for healthier and affordable food and beverage choices at fast food settings (see <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/weight-management-calories/weight-management/better-choices/eating-out.html>) or 2) help parents determine practical alternatives for quick/easy and nutritious meals with less reliance on fast food.

Fulkerson JA, Farbaksh K, Lytle L, Hearst M, Dengel D, Pasch KE, Kubik MY. Away-from-home family dinner sources and associations with weight status, body composition and related biomarkers of chronic disease among adolescents and their parents. *J Am Diet Assoc* 2011;111:1892-1897.

Anderson B, Rafferty AP, Lyon-Callo S, Fussman C, Imes G. Fast-food consumption and obesity among Michigan adults. *Prev. Chronic Dis.* 2011;8(4):A71.

Duffey KJ, Gordon-Larsen P, Steffen LM, Jacobs DR Jr, Popkin BM. Regular consumption from fast food establishments relative to other restaurants is differentially associated with metabolic outcomes in young adults. *J Nutr.* 2009;139:2113-2118.



Comparing Nutrition Policies at Childcare Centers and Role Modeling of Healthy Eating Behaviors by Caregivers

By Gayle Coleman

A new study indicates that nutrition policies at childcare centers alone may not be sufficient to promote modeling of healthy mealtime behaviors among childcare providers. Erinoshio and colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill compared nutrition policies at 50 North Carolina childcare centers with data collected through surveys completed by childcare center staff and observations of these staff by trained observers.

Directors at each of these childcare centers completed a survey that assessed center policies. Directors reported that: 33% of centers had written policies about food brought in by center staff; 34% had policies about staff modeling of eating behaviors; 23% had policies about encouraging healthier foods for meals and snacks; 18% had policies about discouraging unhealthy foods for meals and snacks; and 16% have policies about having information nutrition talks at meals. Most directors reported having unwritten policies about encouraging healthier foods (63%), discouraging unhealthy foods (72%) and having informal nutrition talks with children at mealtime (60%).

At each of these childcare centers, teachers of preschool classrooms were invited to complete a survey that included questions about being a role model for the children. Of the 124 caregivers who completed the surveys: all were female; 53% were non-Hispanic white; 39% were non-Hispanic black; 10% had completed at least some high school; and 68% had some college, an associate's degree or a college degree. The vast majority of these caregivers (96%) reported that it was "important" or "extremely important" to be actively involved in their classes' mealtime activities. 84% of these caregivers reported that they "often" or "consistently" used their own behavior to encourage their classes to eat healthy, and 48% reported "very often" or "always" showing children that they enjoyed fruits and vegetables (compared to 6% who reported "rarely or never".) 55% of these caregivers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they were role models for healthy eating for children in their classroom; 35% "slightly agreed;" and "10% "disagreed."

Research staff with backgrounds in nutrition and public health and who received extensive training about how to do observations in childcare center classrooms observed caregivers eating behaviors at mealtimes for four full days. A total of 112 caregivers were observed in these 50 childcare centers. Caregivers were observed drinking sweetened beverages at about half of the childcare centers and caregivers were observed eating a salty snack at about 20% of childcare centers. Caregivers were observed consuming unhealthy foods (sweetened beverages, salty snacks, fast food, sugary treats) in the presence of children during mealtimes on at least one of the four days observed. Caregivers also were observed modeling healthy dietary behaviors to children on each of the four days observed. At most centers, caregivers were observed sitting with children, eating the same foods as children, eating fruits and vegetables in front of children, and telling children that fruits and vegetables taste good.

Results of this study suggest that policies alone may not be enough to promote modeling of healthy eating behaviors. Although survey results cannot be directly matched to the results from



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observations, the results suggest that for some caregivers there is a disconnect between what they said they do and what they actually do.

The authors concluded that center policies that encourage healthy eating promote positive mealtime interactions between caregivers and children but not the consumption of healthy foods when caregivers are in the presence of children. They recommended:

- including education that encourages caregivers to model healthy eating behaviors to children;
- defining modeling and the specifics involved with it;
- getting centers to provide healthy meals as a benefit to caregivers;
- encouraging directors to promote policies that reflect a commitment to providing children with a healthy food environment.

Implications for Extension Educators: Education provided to childcare center staff could help make policies more explicit and enhance modeling of healthy mealtime behaviors. Several resources are available or in development for these purposes. Dave Riley is currently working on a curriculum to use with childcare providers. This curriculum is based on the book, *Rethinking Nutrition: Connecting Science and Practice in Early Childhood Settings*. Education for childcare providers may be particularly effective if combined with the work of community coalitions who are working to enhance center nutrition policies and the nutrition environment in childcare settings. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Program recently made Healthy Bites (http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/Sites/Community/Childcare/HealthyBites_Sept8.pdf) available to childcare providers. This resource encourages childcare centers to develop and implement policies to encourage a healthy eating environment. A similar resource, Active Early (<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/P0/P00280.pdf>) encourages childcare centers to develop and implement policies and an environment to support physical activity.

Source: Erinosh TO, Hales DP, McWilliams CP, Emunah J, Stanton Ward D. Nutrition Policies at Child-Care Centers and Impact on Role Modeling of Healthy Eating Behaviors of Caregivers. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2012;112(1):119-124.

Nitzke S, Riley D, Ramminger A, Jacobs G. *Rethinking Nutrition: Connecting Science and Practice in Early Childhood Settings*, 2011. (The Redleaf Professional Library.)



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Resources added to the WNEP/FLP resource database

Create a One-dish Pasta Salad,

https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=8936

SNAK-O (bingo), https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=8940

Healthy and Homemade 2011 displays – note that the 2012 displays have replaced the 2011 at The Learning Store site, and the 2011 displays were transitioned to the FLP resource database.

There are several resources available through www.eXtension.org, Families, Food and Fitness resource area that may be of interest. Although this resource is not listed in the resource database, it is linked on the UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension homepage. You might find these resources useful in your teaching, as hyperlinks in on-line newsletters or hyperlinks from your county webpages. Note that not all of these resources are in-scope for WNEP.

To access, click on YouTube videos and channel at the bottom of this page. [My favorite is the talking TV in Tame the Tube.]

Enjoy More Fruits and Vegetables

- [Video - "All 4 Kids" Pack It Up](#)

Move More Everyday

- [Video - "All 4 Kids" Boogie Oogie Slide](#)
- [Video - "All 4 Kids" Chant](#)
- [Video - "All 4 Kids" Ven Conmigo](#)
- [Video - Fit Physical Activity Into Your Day](#)

Prepare and Eat More Meals at Home

- [Smart Start: Guiding Your Child to a Lifetime of Healthy Eating](#)
- [Video - Plan Shop Fix Eat](#)
- [Video - Supermarket Savings](#)
- [Video - The Original Fast Food](#)

Right Size Your Portions

- [Video - Smart Restaurant Choices](#)
- [Video - Smart Vending Machine Choices](#)
- [Video - The Fast Food Experiment](#)

Tame the Tube

- [Video - Limit TV Viewing](#)