

Improving restaurant kids' meals helps parents too

Eating out can be a break from the usual routine, a chance to try new foods, or a way to celebrate, but it can also be stressful for parents trying to encourage their kids to adopt a healthy diet. Items on the children's menu are typically high in calories and lacking in nutrition.

Most foods have some redeeming qualities (protein in chicken nuggets, calcium in macaroni and cheese). The notable exception is sugar-sweetened beverages, which typically offer only calories. Fountain drinks, in particular, offer up empty calories before the eating has even started. Water, milk, and (to a lesser extent) 100% fruit juice, the beverages included in S.70, are much better choices for children's health.

Kids' meals send a strong cultural message to children as they are establishing their dietary habits. While the meals may appeal to children, they create challenges for parents trying to instill good eating habits. When it comes to eating out, parents can end up feeling that their own dietary intentions for their kids have been hijacked. Offering healthy defaults guides children towards making healthier decisions without removing ultimate choice.

Our children are the first generation that may, on average, [live shorter lives](#) than their parents due to obesity and associated chronic diseases like diabetes. Disproving these predictions requires support from everyone. Through proposed legislation S.70, Vermont restaurants can lead the way by replacing unhealthy default beverages with healthier choices. This would support the intentions of most parents I know and help prime children for making a life's worth of healthy choices as adults.

Life expectancy reference:

<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMSr043743>