

## **Project: Vermont Restaurant Owner & Manager Perspectives on Creating Heart-Healthy Kids Meals**

**Introduction:** The obesity epidemic is exacerbated by the lack of healthy children's menus in restaurants. In order to better understand children's menus in Vermont, we investigated the nutrition of children's menus, restaurant perspectives on customer ordering habits, and barriers that prevent restaurants from making children's menus healthier.

**Methods:** Our questionnaire was modeled after the *Children's Menu Assessment Tool* and included a combination of yes/no and Likert scale response questions. We identified 145 Vermont restaurants with children's menus and randomly surveyed 46 by phone. Data was collected using LimeSurvey™ and analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

**Results:** The majority of restaurants offer healthy (80%) and unhealthy (80%) entrées as well as healthy sides (80%). Most restaurants offer 100% fruit juice and milk, and 50% do not list soda on their children's menus. Most interviewees reported that they have the resources and ability to improve the nutritional quality of their children's menus and that it would not affect sales or costs. However, most stated that children would not choose healthy options and that, while children's menus should consider nutrition, parents are ultimately responsible for making healthy choices for their children.

**Conclusions:** Vermont restaurants offer healthy and unhealthy food for children. Improving the healthiness of children's menus will involve parents and restaurants because a dominant barrier to restaurants offering healthier options is ensuring that customers will choose them. Future research should include customer perspectives to assess if healthy items are being purchased and to discover strategies that encourage parents and children to choose healthier meals.

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