Unhealthy foods threaten the health of children

Texas children are consuming fast food and fried snacks at worrying levels. These unhealthy foods are generally consumed away from home, are highly-processed, and tend to be relatively low in nutrients and high in calories.³

Eating Away From Home is a Health Risk

On a given school day:

62.7% of 2nd graders and 42.5% of 11th graders ate at a restaurant.¹

Eating away from home in 4th graders varies by race/ethnicity:¹

- 36.0% of White/Other
- 54.2% of African Americans
- 42.1% of Hispanics.

Most students who eat at restaurants eat fried foods:¹

- 78.5% of 2nd graders
- 79.8% of 4th graders
- 82.1% of 8th graders
- 81.8% of 11th graders.

Most students who eat at restaurants drink a sugar-sweetened drink*:¹

- 56.9% of 2nd graders
- 72.7% of 4th graders
- 71.6% of 8th graders
- 65.8% of 11th graders.

Why This Behavior is Risky

Eating too much fast food can affect children’s overall nutritional status due to excessive calories and fat, and an overall low nutritional value.² Eating fast food is associated with other poor dietary choices including:²

- More soft drinks and chips available at home
- Lower intake of fruits and vegetables

35.3% of 8th graders ate at a restaurant yesterday and here’s what they ate¹:

- 71.5% ate fries/chips
- 43.8% ate meat
- 40.8% ate any fried snack
- 71.6% drank a sugar-sweetened beverage*

We can increase healthy food choices when eating away from home by:

- Going to restaurants that post calorie information at the point of purchase²
- Choosing food at restaurants that are grilled or baked and always ordering fruits and vegetables⁴
- Supporting limitations on advertising fast food to children⁵
- Supporting policies to limit sugar-sweetened drinks* as the default for kids meals⁵
- Supporting policies that limit the distance of fast food restaurants from schools⁷
Current Low Nutritional Value Food Guidelines

Reduce sodium intake and limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats.9

- **Sodium:**
  - Ages 1-3: No more than 1,500 mg
  - Ages 4-8: No more than 1,900 mg
  - Ages 9-13: No more than 2,200 mg
  - Ages 14-18: No more than 2,300 mg

- **Added sugars:** Less than 10% of daily calories
- **Saturated Fats:** Less than 10% of daily calories

Choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages.9

References

1. School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Project. Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. SPAN project details available online at go.uth.edu/SPAN.
   The School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Project is a surveillance system monitoring the prevalence of overweight/obesity in school-aged children in Texas conducted by researchers at the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. SPAN has been funded by the Texas Department of State Health Services since 2000 to conduct height and weight measurements across different grade levels.


*Sugar-sweetened beverage is defined as a regular (not diet) soda, punch, or sports drink on the Texas SPAN Survey1

About the Texas Child Health Status Report

These reports utilize state-level data from the School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Project to provide an accurate representation of Texas child health. This project is funded by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation.

Learn more at http://go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth

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