

# fast foods & soft drinks: how to make healthier choices

Generally, meals eaten at fast food restaurants have a lot of calories, fat, sugar and salt and lack the vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients that your children need to grow healthy and strong.

## unhealthy choices



## better choices



### When children eat too much fast food:

- They eat too many calories and too much fat and sugar
- They gain too much weight
- They eat fewer fruits and vegetables
- They drink more sweetened drinks
- They drink less milk

### How often do your children eat fast food items or at fast food restaurants?

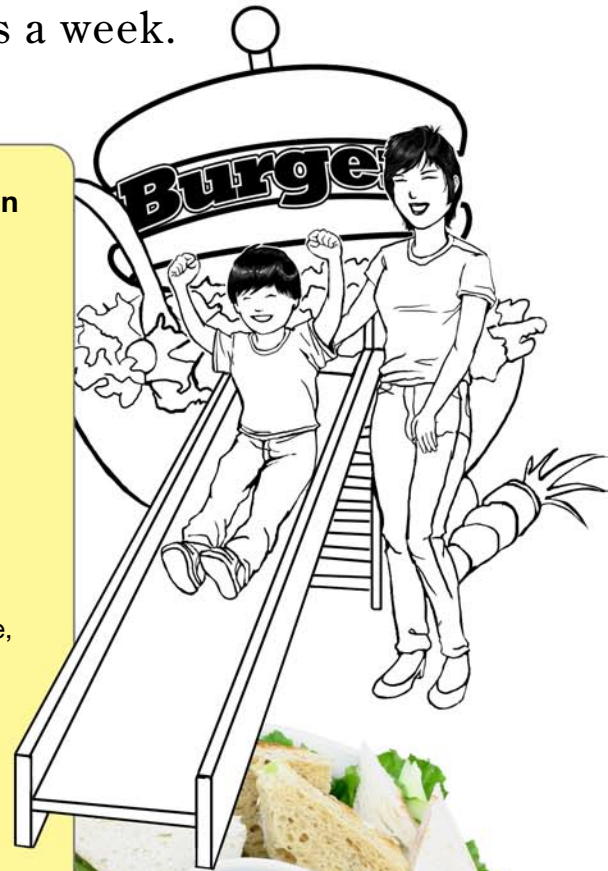
- once a month or less
- once a week
- twice a week
- three or more times a week



It's OK to enjoy fast food once in a while but it is not a great idea to eat there several times a week.

**When taking your children to a fast food restaurant, what can you do to cut down on calories, fat and sugar?**

- Order the regular or kid-size portions and not the bigger sizes. Bigger portions usually mean more calories and fat.
- Sometimes even the regular portion size is too big for a child. Splitting the order and sharing it with a friend is also a good idea.
- Order a salad with "lite", low-fat or non-fat dressing. Regular salad dressings are high in fat.
- Watch the additions to your salad. Fried noodles, shredded cheese, croutons, egg and bacon bits all add fat and calories to your meal.
- Allow kids to order the kid's meal, so they can get the toys, but make substitutions for the soda and fries if possible.
- Balance fast food meals with healthy food choices throughout the rest of the day.



**Fast food restaurants now have healthier items on their menu. Try to order at least one of these items every time:**

- grilled chicken or fish sandwich with no sauce
- whole wheat rolls
- fruit and yogurt
- baked potato (with vegetables instead of cheese, butter or sour cream)
- single hamburger (regular or children's size)
- low fat deli sandwiches on wheat bread or on pita bread
- whole wheat tortillas (without dressing)
- fat free / low fat milk or fruit juice



**And try to order fewer of these items, they are the least healthy fast food choices:**

- chicken nuggets
- croissant breakfast sandwiches (croissants or pastries in general)
- fried fish or fried chicken sandwiches
- fried chicken
- large and jumbo size fries
- onion rings
- mayonnaise
- cheese sauce, most “special” sauces, tartar sauce
- ketchup
- salad dressing



What your children drink throughout the day is as important as what they eat.

Children need to drink a lot of fluids in order to prevent dehydration, maintain regular bowel habits and keep their skin and hair healthy.



**When children drink too many soft drinks and sugar sweetened fruit drinks such as Coke, Pepsi, Kool-Aid, Coco Rico, Capri Sun, Sunny Delight, Tang, Pearl Tapioca drinks, Gatorade, etc. they may:**

- Gain too much weight
- Develop cavities and tooth decay
- Drink less milk and water
- Not get enough vitamins, minerals and other nutrients
- Consume too much caffeine which can lead to headaches and difficulty with sleeping

The best beverages for your children are water, milk and 100% fruit juices.

**It's important to promote healthy drinking habits in your children early on. What can you do to help them?**

- Limit the availability of sweetened drinks at home
- Encourage children to choose milk, 100% fruit juice or water at home and when eating out
- Make fresh-squeezed juices with fresh fruit
- Limit your own consumption of soft drinks and choose healthy beverages instead



Set a good example,  
food and sweetened



limit your own fast  
drink consumption.



**What You Do, Your Child Sees and Does.**

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# talk & listen to your children

## **Most children don't understand that the purpose of advertising is to sell things.**

- ① When they watch TV, they are exposed to hundreds of advertisements for high sugar breakfast cereal, candy, soft drinks, chips and pastries. None of these are foods your child should be eating often.
- ① These ads may try to convince your children that eating a certain food or having a certain toy will make them happy or popular.
- ① Young children don't know the difference between the content of a program and a commercial.

Talk to your kids about advertisements. When your child asks for products advertised on TV, explain that the purpose of commercials is to make people want things they may not need.

## **Take time to watch TV with your children. When you watch an advertisement, ask them questions like the ones below to make them think about and understand the real purpose of these ads.**

- ② What is the purpose of advertising?  
*To sell products.*
- ② Why do the ads only talk about the good things and not the bad things about the products they are selling?  
*If they talked about the bad; for example caloric and nutritional content of fast foods, soft drinks and candies; the products would appear less appealing and it wouldn't sell.*
- ② Why are famous people often in ads?  
*They want you to think that if you buy that product, you will become more like these famous people.*
- ② Why do ads sometimes make misleading claims?  
*To make the product seem better than it actually is.*

Limit the number of commercials your child sees  
by limiting their TV time to 1 or 2 hours per day  
&  
by having them watch public television stations (i.e. PBS),  
which have good quality programs and no commercials.