The Not So Happy Happy Meal

Take control of your child's nutrition one kids meal at a time. View kids meal nutrition guides for fast food meals.

Denver (PRWEB) March 26, 2008 -- The combination of fast food and cheap toys create a near universal appeal for kid's meals in America. With many children (pre-teen) raised on the appeal and instant gratification promised by the all powerful kid's meal, it's easy to see how small choices can impact your child's health.

Take the most popular meal of all - the McDonald's Happy Meal. With the hamburger variety topping out at about 600 calories and many families opting for 2-3x per week, parents struggle to balance the benefits of convenience with real world nutrition. With incidence rates of childhood obesity and diabetes at record levels, it's clear parents need to step up their control of food choices that can be habit forming at an early age.

Add in the standard soda and you've just super sized your child's waistline too. Consider the following popular choices marketed to children by the leading fast food chains:

- Burger King Kids Meal (Cheeseburger, Fries, Sprite): 670 calories
- McDonalds Happy Meal (6 piece nuggets, Sm Fries, Sm Coke): 610 calories
- Wendy's Kids Meal (Hamburger, Kids Fries, Sm Coke) 570 calories

With USDA and Institute for Medicine Dietary Reference estimates for moderately active kids (age 4-13) range from 1,400 - 2,200 calories a day. That makes the choice for the throw-away toy and convenient lunch about half of junior's daily calorie quota. That's rough.

Behind the empty calories the nutritional outlook looks even worse. The buns rank high on the GI scale, loaded with sugar and 'enriched' flour and salt. Many parents have been reluctant to apply the same insight into types of fats and carbohydrates when it comes to our kids food selections - in short, convenience tends to win.

For many parents with children, making even a small change can be beneficial. Wayne Becker of GlycemicEdge.com and publisher of the glycemic index table adds "The temptations of convenience foods as mass marketed are everywhere. Start by making smaller, incremental changes - including smaller, more frequent meals with modest portions. Finding lower and moderate GI foods can be done - even at the fast food emporiums - including salads and some soups."

While permanently avoiding fast food choices may not be realistic for many, planning ahead can provide tangible benefits and limit the damage. Becker recommends:

- Plan ahead - Bring snacks and healthier choices for mobile trips packed from home
- Glycemic Index friendly - Look for whole grain foods and limit high GI choices (high & hidden sugar foods)
- Smaller portions - portion control offsets even poor food options
- Break the habit - avoid the expectation for fast food. Once a month is a treat. Once or twice a week can be habit forming.

"Let's face it - tackling the millions of advertising dollars and recurring messages adolescents face is a tall order. Kids are inundated with guilty, unhealthy food choices at nearly every turn." Becker recommends parents
make informed choices - even a small improvement can help your child and reduce the incidence of future heart
disease, diabetes, and other ailments.

While the occasional convenience detour or treat is at times undeniable, limiting the frequency for trips to
McDonald's and other fast food convenience options is key to taking control of your child's nutrition and
preventing a super sized headache.

About http://www.glycemicedge.com

Glycemic Edge is an information, research, and knowledge sharing site focused on nutrition plans related to the
Glycemic Index Diet.

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