

News Column

By: Cassidy Lutz

K-State Research and Extension Greenwood County

Family and Community Wellness Extension Agent

Are Kids' Menus Truly Made for Kids?

Chicken strips, burgers, pizza, grilled cheese, and French fries.

When you read this list of foods, it might strike you that these options are often found on kids' menus. As adults, we have the choice between all of those previously listed as well as many others.

The idea that children need different foods than adults is a common misconception thrust onto consumers via clever marketing tactics.

The concept of kids' menus originates from the prohibition era as a way for businesses to offset the loss of alcohol sales revenue. Although that was nearly 100 years ago, we have become so custom to seeing them that they are now a social norm.

According to a statement from the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior, kids truly do not need different food options as compared to adults. Other than age-appropriate modifications for texture and portion size, there are no differences in healthy food recommendations for adults or children aged two and older.

Foods marketed toward children are usually highly processed and contain high amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars. This means they are full of energy and low in nutrients to help support learning, play, and growth. Many types of fast foods are great examples of unhealthy short-term fillers as opposed to more nutritious options that help keep kids fuller longer.

When adults encourage kids to choose from the children's menu items, we are often negatively influencing their food preferences and encouraging picky eating behaviors that have future health consequences.

Instead of assuming your child wants chicken strips next time you eat out, give them the same options as you have as an adult - as long as the food does not present a health hazard such as choking. To support healthy growth and development at all stages of life, reframe the concept of children's foods as a variety of tasty, healthy options. Try to include colorful vegetables and fruits, whole grains, nuts, lean meat, and low-fat dairy.

Balanced diets are just as, if not more, important for young developing children as for adults.

For more information about Family and Community Wellness, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, contact the office at 620-583-7455, email me at celutz@ksu.edu or stop by the office. Visit the K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County Facebook page and www.greenwood.k-state.edu for more up-to-date information on programming.