

# Take Control of Your Child's Meals



**Almost 1/3 of American children eat a fast food meal daily. Many of these meals contain 400 to almost 600 calories. That is 1/2 of the daily calorie intake that an average 4 – 5 year old needs. The fat and sodium content in these meals are also high.**

Many toddlers start the day with sugary cereal. The sugar content for the top 10 most sugary cereals ranges from 32% to 44%. That is almost like eating a glazed donut.

These eating practices are a health concern. It is estimated that 17% of young kids age 2 to 19 are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity leads to adult health issues like diabetes and high cholesterol.

Parents want their kids to eat healthy. Yet, today's hectic lifestyles and food ads make it hard to control what kids *want* to eat. Companies target young kids with clever ads during children's TV programs. Research shows that fast food ads also run during adult shows.

Market researchers know that companies need to reach kids at an early age. It is estimated that kids ages 2–5 see about 550 cereal ads per year. Ads create feelings that cause kids to ask for unhealthy food. Parents often buy the food their kids *want*.

Kids are watching increased hours of TV. It is no wonder that they ask for sugary cereal and fast food. Online surveys found that 40% of kids ages 2–11 ask to go to McDonalds at least once a week. Eighty-four percent of parents give in to their request.

## Take control of your toddler's diet.

- **Limit TV time.** Show DVDs or use DVR without commercials. Mute TV ads.
- **Plan your family meals,** and shop for the needed items.
- **Limit fast food meals.** Make it a special outing – not an answer to the lack of time.
- **Pick fast food that offers fruit and low-fat milk as options.** Skip french fries and soda.
- **Read the cereal box.** Know what ingredients the cereal contains.
- **Serve low-sugar cereal instead of high-sugar cereal.** You can *control* the amount of sugar added. Let your toddler add his favorite *fruit*. A recent study shows that kids eat healthier when eating a low sugar cereal with a little added sugar and fruit.
- **Do not serve sugar cereal as a snack.**
- **Control your child's portion of cereal.**

With careful planning, parents can control their child's eating by buying healthy food.

*Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital to help keep kids safe, healthy and happy.*



Call the Parent Help Line. Help is just a phone call away.  
1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week  
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