

A Golden Opportunity for McDonald's to Finally Do the Right Thing

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On Nov. 2, 2010, the effort to fight childhood obesity gained momentum. On that day, the [San Francisco Board of Supervisors](#) voted 8-3 to require that kids' meals meet certain nutritional standards before they can be sold with toys.¹ The ban is similar to the one [passed by Santa Clara County](#) last April.² And while San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsome vetoed the ban (as he had threatened to do from the outset), the 8-3 vote meant the board could uphold its ruling with a repeat vote, which it did by the same 8-3 margin only days following the mayor's veto.

The San Francisco version of the ban sets the bar for *healthy* children's meals as those "that have less than 600 calories, contain fruits and vegetables, and include beverages without excessive fat or sugar." A review of the [nutritional information of Happy Meals](#) provided by McDonald's³ (see table) reveals that while its "healthy" choices meet the calorie requirement and may not feature overtly sugar-laden options such as soft drinks, they would not be considered particularly "healthy" by anyone with a shred of knowledge about nutrition for children. (Notice the high carbohydrate and sodium counts, as well as the absence or near-absence of dietary fiber. Also bear in mind that while the standard Happy Meal options - the ones with French fries and chocolate milk / soda instead of apples and plain milk / juice - have more calories, fat and sodium, they also generally have less sugar and more fiber than the supposedly "healthy" meals.)

In addition to the above actions, the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest [is expected to file a lawsuit](#) against the McDonald's corporation in an effort to force McDonald's to stop "unfair and deceptive acts and practices by advertising and including toys with purchases of Happy Meals."⁴⁻⁵

So, now we have a city, a county and an impending lawsuit demanding that the McDonald's corporation stop using toys to entice children to eat unhealthy meals. And while this all may seem a bit overblown, consider the current plight of American children. It is no secret that childhood obesity is on the rise in the U.S., with one in eight Caucasian children and one in four Hispanic/African-American children [considered obese or overweight](#).⁶

What should McDonald's and every other food seller do? It's more than obvious. Put toys only in healthy meals. Reward children for eating *nutritious* meals with fruits, vegetables and milk instead of French fries and sodas.

Like a dentist giving out candy for good behavior during a checkup, the McDonald's corporation has taught children poor eating habits for more than 30 years. It has made billions of dollars using toys to encourage children to eat junk food. Our society is just beginning to pay out the trillions of dollars that will be required for the health care costs associated with the increased cases of diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers that can be the result of being overweight and obese.

It's time the McDonald's corporation became a responsible citizen and began teaching children

proper eating habits. If it (and other fast-food companies) begin now, we could see a reversal in the trend of childhood obesity before the year 2030. The impact of such a reversal in terms of our nation's health (and health care costs) would be monumental, considering a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that by 2050, [up to 33 percent of the U.S. population](#) will suffer from diabetes - a known consequence of obesity.

Nutritional Information For McDonald's "Healthy" Happy Meals*

| | Calories | Fat (g) | Sat. Fat (g) | Carbohydrates (g) | Sodium (mg) | Sugar (g) | Dietary Fiber (g) |
|---|----------|---------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Hamburger, "Apple Dippers" (apples) with low-fat caramel dip, and 1% low-fat milk (8 fl. oz.) | 450 | 12 | 5 | 66 | 680 | 33 | 2 |
| Hamburger, apples, apple juice (6.75 fl. oz.) | 440 | 9 | 3.5 | 77 | 570 | 43 | 2 |
| Chicken McNuggets (4 pc), apples, 1% milk | 390 | 15 | 4 | 46 | 570 | 27 | 0 |
| Chicken McNuggets, apples, apple juice | 380 | 12 | 2.5 | 57 | 460 | 37 | 0 |
| Cheeseburger, apples, 1% milk | 500 | 15 | 8 | 67 | 920 | 33 | 2 |
| Cheeseburger, apples, apple juice | 490 | 13 | 6 | 79 | 810 | 43 | 2 |

**By comparison, McDonald's standard Happy Meals featuring French fries and 1% chocolate milk (8 fl. oz.) or Sprite (12 fl. oz.) instead of Apple Dippers and plain milk / juice have up to 700 calories, 27 grams of fat and 1,060 mg sodium, depending on the meal. However, most standard meals also feature lower sugar content and higher fiber content than the so-called "healthy" options.*

References

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