

Feed Your Athlete's Body with the Fuel it Needs

*"If we win, let's go out to Dairy Queen." (Coach Focus Group participant)*

### ***KEY FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY YOUTH SPORT FOCUS GROUPS:***

#### **Coaches recognize that the youth sport food environment is unhealthy.**

- **Unhealthy foods and beverages:** Coaches regularly observe children eating fast food, candy, chips and sugary beverages. Children often drink sports drinks with the expectation that these beverages fuel them better than water when they play sports.
- **Concession stand food options:** Coaches reported that league run concession stand items include hamburgers, hotdogs, candy, chips, donuts, muffins, sugary drinks, and few, if any healthy items.
- **Team snacks:** Coaches reported that team snacks are expected after every practice or game, consisting mainly of pre-packaged bulk sugary snacks and sugary beverages for younger players. Older players, on traveling sports teams, often go out together for fast food after practice, games, and during tournaments.
- **Time constraints:** Coaches observed that busy family schedules often prevent children from coming to practice or games properly fed so families rely on fast food and concession stands to feed their child.

#### **Coaches feel powerless to help make positive changes to the youth sport food environment.**

- Some coaches reported insufficient nutrition knowledge necessary to provide guidance to participants.
- Coaches with sufficient nutrition knowledge often feel that they do not have league or parent support to make nutrition suggestions to participants.
- Some coaches feel that they should play no role in nutrition guidance because they do not want to interfere with parent food decisions.
- Some coaches underestimate or dismiss their potential impact on children's' food and beverage choices.

#### **Coaches believe that opportunities for positive changes exist to improve nutrition among children in sports.**

- Provide coach nutrition education and training.
  - Many coaches are willing to participate in nutrition education as part of their coaching training.
  - Nutrition education coupled with league support could empower coaches to **make good nutrition an expectation of youth sport participation.**
- Youth sport leagues should provide a unified healthy food/nutrition message to families including snack and concession policy changes.
  - Explore healthy concession stand options while exploring other league funding options.
  - Provide nutrition education for league families.
    - Coaches suggested enlisting college coaches, athletes, and nutrition experts to deliver this message. Coaches reported that youth sport participants would most likely listen to these experts with the message framed as **"nutrition is part of being an athlete."**
- Improve communication to achieve the common goal:
  - Coaches, parents, and communities can work together to improve nutrition at youth sport venues.

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