

# WHAT DO PARENTS THINK ABOUT THE FOODS AND BEVERAGES KIDS CONSUME IN YOUTH SPORT SETTINGS?

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*Key findings from focus groups with parents of sport participants in Minneapolis and Bloomington, Minnesota*

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## **Children commonly consume *unhealthy* snacks in youth sport settings**

Parents were asked to recall the most recent post-game snack that their child ate, and the **most common responses** were:

- Sweets (candy, ice cream, doughnuts)
- Fast food (McDonald's, Chipotle)
- Pizza, hot dogs, and taco in a bag
- Salty snacks (chips, cheese puffs, nachos)

\*\*\* Only a few parents recalled healthy foods such as fruit and yogurt

## **A variety of factors influence what children in sports eat and drink**

- **Time Pressure:** By far, this was the most common barrier to healthy eating in conjunction with sports. Most parents report that busy schedules, evening practice times, and multi-game tournaments make it difficult to prepare meals at home and bring healthy snacks. Many parents say it's easy to stop at concessions stands or pull into fast food restaurants after games and practices, and the foods consumed at these locations are often unhealthy.
- **Level of sport competition:** Parents report that eating fast food and concession stand food is more common in traveling sports and during multi-day tournaments and less common with in-house leagues.
- **Nutrition messages from parents, coaches, and advertisements:** Parents report that kids are influenced by the examples their parents set at home, coach's advice about nutrition and performance, and advertisements for sports drinks. Parents say their kids believe sports drinks will help them perform better.

## **Parents are concerned about the foods and beverages kids consume in sports**

- Parents recognize that most of the snacks kids consume in conjunction with sports are unhealthy.
- Most parents are dissatisfied with the types of foods and beverages currently offered at youth sport venues and would like to see healthier food and beverage options.
- Most parents think organized snack schedules are unnecessary, and they would prefer not to participate.
- A few parents are not concerned about what kids consume in conjunction with sports because they think they will burn it off in sports, and their child is not currently overweight.
- Most parents think it would be difficult to provide healthy options at concession stands and are unsure if children would eat them even if they were offered.

## **Parents want to be more knowledgeable about nutrition in sports**

- Most parents have questions about healthy and quick food options for kids in sports and the value of sports drinks for performance. A few parents say they already have adequate knowledge.
- Parents want to know what foods will provide kids with energy prior to and in between games.
- Most parents think nutrition information for both parents and youth sport participants would be helpful.

## **Opportunities to improve nutrition among children in sports**

- **For parents:** Provide parents with a nutrition handout that contains *healthy* and *convenient* snack and meal suggestions for children in sports as well as information about hydration during sports.
- **For youth sport participants:** Provide coaches with nutrition education materials and key nutrition messages that can be conveyed to children in sports. Parents report that kids will listen to nutrition messages if they come from coaches or older athletes, but they will NOT listen to information from their parents.
- **For youth sport leagues:** Develop nutrition guidelines for sport leagues. Guidelines may apply to organized snack schedules and concession stands. Explore ways to provide healthier food options in youth sport settings.

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