Diverse Children recognize the importance of choosing healthy foods when eating away from home. However, those who infrequently ate meals away from home felt these were special occasions, so eating healthy was not important. Most meals children ate away from home were consumed at school with kids reporting they ate breakfast, lunch, and snacks at school. Lunch was the most common school meal, and frequently included pizza, hamburgers, and chicken nuggets served with milk. Almost all kids reported their parents considered it important for children to eat healthy foods when away from home to maintain good health. Children acknowledged receiving advice from parents to eat healthy (eat fruits and vegetables), but were allowed to decide for themselves what to eat when away from home. When eating out, kids choose water, soda, or juice drinks and, when eating out was a special occasion, they were more likely to drink sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs). A barrier to healthy eating when away from home was availability of unhealthy food, but kids indicated that they could overcome this and take responsibility by asking for healthy foods or packing healthy options to bring from home. Children suggested that parents help kids by checking what kids eat or pack to eat away from home, monitoring foods kids buy, and keeping healthy options available at home. To help children choose healthy foods when eating away from home, kids thought parents should provide incentives and pack healthy options. Kids also felt parents should talk to caregivers about having healthy options for the kids. Children acknowledged that people around them influenced their food choices, they mimicked their parents’ choices, and that siblings copy what they eat or vice versa.

Conclusions: Children recognize the importance of choosing healthy foods when eating away from home, but without parental oversight or healthy options available, children typically choose less healthy options.

Methods

- Sample: 194 children aged 6-11 years
- Average age 8.4 years
- From Florida, New Jersey, and West Virginia

Data Collection

- Survey (n=194)
- Focus groups (n=44)
- Conducted by trained moderators using a scripted moderator’s guide
- Data constantly compared to identify data saturation point
- Content analyzed by researchers trained in qualitative data analysis

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