Overhauling the sports snack stand



Swimmers enjoy Diana's Frozen Chocolate Covered Bananas from their newly revamped snack stand.

As you stand watching your budding baseball star at his five o'clock practice, the rest of your kids start to whine. "Please, please, please," they say. "Can we go to the snack stand? We can't wait for dinner." Feeling faint from hunger yourself, you begrudgingly acquiesce and later cringe as you see them trouping back from the snack stand with fluorescent nacho cheese covered chips and candy. Sound familiar? Today we bring you thoughts from a mom who did the unthinkable… she revamped her kids' sports snack stand menu. Now she brings you ideas to overhaul yours. We are impressed. –Drs. Kardos and Lai

Skittles, hot dogs, nachos, soda, and ice cream. If you have been to your child's sporting event recently, then this should sound like a typical snack stand menu. Somehow, sports and junk food are synonymous. But doesn't that contradict itself? Aren't we having our children participate in sports

to keep them healthy? Well, then, why are we feeding our children junk food at the very moment that they need fuel to help them perform better? These foods are laden with sugar, trans fat, and sodium, foods which will adversely affect the health of your family.

As parents, we need to take back control of what we are feeding our children. Statistics show that type 1 and type 2 diabetes are on the increase among children. According to the SEARCH for Diabetes in Youth study, the prevalence of type 2 diabetes increased 21 percent among American youth from 2001-2009, while type 1 diabetes rose 23 percent. The effects of diabetes are staggering: heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, nervous system disease, and poor circulation leading to amputation. And diabetes is only one of the many negative results of eating processed junk food.

You may be thinking, what's the harm in eating a little junk food at snack stands? Well, it wouldn't be overly harmful if snack stands were the only place that our children occasionally purchase junk food. Think about all of the other locations that our children consume unhealthy food: school lunches, fast food restaurants, vending machines, and convenience stores. All of these poor food choices add up and will eventually lead to serious health consequences.

Over the past few weeks, I revamped the menu of the snack stand for my daughters' summer swim team. I was apprehensive about making these changes because I was concerned about how the parents and children would react. Would my own children be subjected to teasing because I took away the M&M's? I was able to transform the menu from items riddled with sugar and trans fat to whole foods fresh from our grocery store. Here's a sample of items that we offered:

Old Menu

New Menu

Skittles

Fresh Fruit Salad
Cupcakes
Smoothies made from fruit
Brownies
Chocolate Covered Frozen Bananas
Cow
Tails
Trail Mix
Soft
Pretzels
Air Popped Popcorn
Hoagies on White Bread Subway
Hoagies on Whole Wheat Bread
Snapple (with more sugar than soda!) Water
Gatorade
100% Fruit Juice

Of the hundreds of families that we served, I only had one person who complained. One! Instead, I had an outpouring of support and many families who appreciated having fresh, healthy food choices for their family. One dad went as far as emailing the president of our board to compliment us on our healthy snack stand.

So, what can you do if your snack stand does not yet offer healthy choices? Here's a bit of food for thought:

- Pack your own snacks! You can control what your family is eating by giving them healthy choices.* Here are my favorite items to pack in our cooler:
  - Water
  - Peanut Butter and Banana Sandwiches on whole wheat (cut them into quarters for little snacks to share)
  - Make your own trail mix with a variety of nuts, plain cheerios, and toss in a few mini chocolate

chips to make this feel like a sweet treat!
        - Nature Valley Honey Oat Snack Bars
        - Fruit Kabobs
        - Applesauce cups (natural, no sugar)
        - Fruit cups (packed in fruit juice)
        - Cheese sticks
        - Air popped popcorn – pop enough in an air popper to store in a new trash bag. Add a little melted butter and salt and shake. Bring solo cups and scoop out for your child to share with their friends.
    - If you must purchase an unhealthy choice from a snack stand, then try splitting it into two portions. Ask your child to eat half of it now, and save the other half. Cutting the portion size down is an important step towards getting healthy.
    - Try feeding your family before you leave for an event. You will have more control and choices about what your child eats.
    - Talk to the board of your child's team and ask them to revisit the food that is served in your snack stand.
    - If you are visiting another team, then find the name and email address of the board members and email about making a change.

Together, let's make steps towards changing the way that we think about the food that we feed our children. The next generation's life depends upon it. If that is not enough incentive, then think about how much money you will be saving. Maybe you can save enough to treat yourself to a little something nice. Now, we're talking!

*NOTE: If you child is resistant towards making these changes, focus on one area (i.e. drinks, sandwiches, or snacks) and make that your focus. Do not try to make too many changes all at one. You may find that your chances of success increase when you only focus on one food area at a time.

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