

Promoting Healthy Kids' Meals Online

Many restaurants have updated their children's menus to better support children's health, such as through the introduction of healthy default beverages or the adoption of whole menu nutrition standards. Ordering food online for pick-up in-store or delivery is now a common way people interact with restaurants. A 2024 survey of 1,522 consumers found that 70 percent of respondents ordered food delivery in the past



5 Ct Grilled Nuggets Kid's Meal

Image 1: An image of a Chick-fil-A kids' meal on its website

month and 70 percent picked up takeout in the past month.ⁱ While convenient, online ordering can limit customers' abilities to ask questions and make substitutions. Restaurants that offer online ordering options must provide the same choices that are available on-site to ensure consistency and convenience, while still prioritizing children's health.

This guide offers advice on how restaurants can still promote healthier options on their kids' menu on online ordering platforms, while allowing for substitution and customer choice.

Visual Cues

Many online ordering platforms allow images to accompany meal listings. Including the healthier options in images of kids' meals can remind people that the restaurant offers these healthier options which are part of the typical kids' meal. These images serve as a form of marketing for the healthier kids' meals combinations. For example, on its own website, Chick-fil-A shows its kids' entrees with a fruit cup and 1% milk (Image 1). This is one easy way to promote healthier options for kids.

The visual cues can be supplemented with written descriptions of kids' meals that highlight the healthy menu items. For example, instead of describing a kids' meal as coming with a side and a drink, restaurants can describe the meal as coming with specific healthy items, such as apple slices and non-fat milk. McDonald's has done this on their website (Image 2).

Hamburger Happy Meal®

Hamburger: The Classic McDonald's Burger, World Famous Fries® (Kids), 1% Low Fat Milk Jug, Apple Slices

475 Cal.

Enjoy a Hamburger meal from the [McDonald's Happy Meal](#) menu that your kiddies are sure to love! Wondering what comes in a Happy Meal with Hamburger? McDonald's Hamburger Happy Meal includes a juicy [McDonald's Hamburger](#) with kid-sized [World Famous Fries®](#) and [Apple Slices](#). Then pick a kid's drink: 1% Low Fat Milk Jug, Reduced Sugar* Low Fat Chocolate Milk, DASANI® Water, or Honest Kids® Appley Ever After® Organic Juice Drink. Plus, a McDonald's Happy Meal toy that completes every McDonald's Kids meal.

Image 2: A Happy Meal description on the McDonald's website

Healthy Defaults Online

While visual cues can be helpful, the order and prominence of available options can go a long way towards healthier choices. Restaurants can make the healthier options the default on online ordering platforms, before the less healthy options appear. Defaults have proven to be effective in changing outcomes in other areas, such as

retirement savings and organ donation.^{ii,iii,iv} When restaurants have updated their kids' menus to require healthier default items, it has led to increased purchasing of the healthier menu items.^{v,vi} More recent research confirms this pattern in the online food environment where online grocery shoppers purchased more organic products when presented with organic defaults compared to shoppers who received conventional defaults.^{vii}

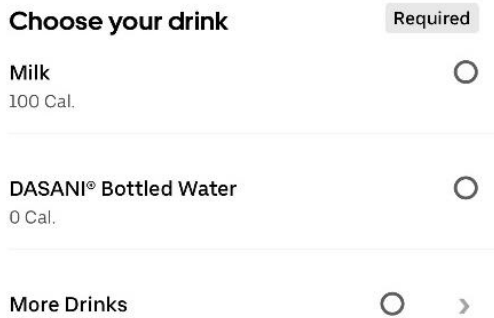


Image 4: Kids' drink options from McDonald's on Uber Eats

In another example, on Uber Eats, McDonald's presents its healthier kids' sides and beverages on one page and other options on a different page, requiring additional navigation to view these items (Image 3 and 4). This still allows people to choose any available option, but effectively makes the healthier options the default and most easily viewed options. Consumers can then make a conscious choice to substitute the healthier items for something else if they wish to do so.

Similarly, when people are ordering from Applebee's, 1% milk is preselected as the default children's beverage option on its website (Image 5). People must then navigate to a different page in order to select something else.

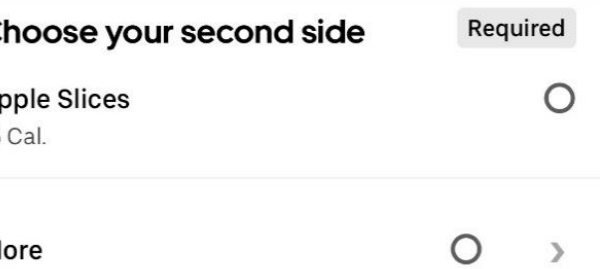


Image 3: Kids' side options from McDonald's on Uber Eats

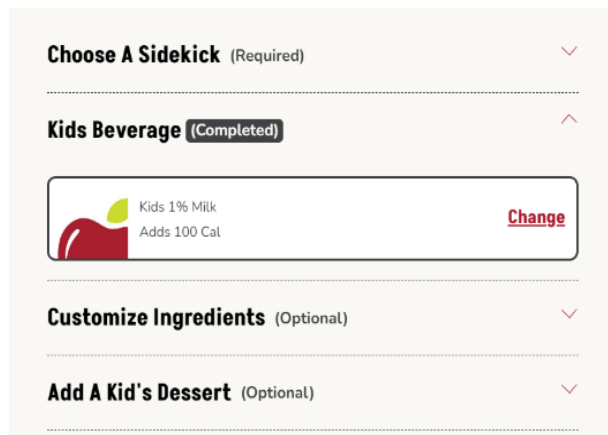


Image 5: Kids' beverage options at Applebee's

GRILLED CHICKEN ON THE BARBIE (5 OZ)

Starting at 160 calories

SIDE OPTIONS

All | Classic Sides



BEVERAGE OPTION

Apple Juice Orange Juice No Beverage

Image 6: Kids' sides options at Outback Steakhouse

Side Options

Required

Sautéed Spinach

Would you like to substitute your side? >

Comes with your choice of beverage Required

Apple Juice

Water

No Beverage

Image 7: Kids' side options at Bonefish Grill on Uber Eats

Outback Steakhouse also presents its healthier options as the default on its website. The healthier sides are listed, and customers are only able to view other side options through additional navigation in a pop-up if they wish to pick something else (Image 6). Only healthy beverage options are available for selection. If customers wish to order a different beverage for their child, they can purchase it separately. Bonefish Grill operates similarly on Uber Eats (Image 7).

These are just a few examples of how restaurants can promote healthy kids' meals through online ordering. We welcome these developments, and additional innovation in this space. For more information about the Center for Science in the Public Interest's kids' meals work, visit our restaurant kids' meals [webpage](#).

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For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at policy@cspinet.org.

ⁱ Doordash. *Restaurant & Alcohol Online Ordering Trends*. 2024. Available <https://get.doordash.com/en-us/resources/restaurant-online-ordering-trends>. Accessed July 18, 2024.

ⁱⁱ Clark JW, Young JA. Automatic enrollment: The power of the default. Vanguard Research. 2021. Available <https://institutional.vanguard.com/VGApp/iip/site/institutional/researchcommentary/article/InvComPowerAutoEnrollment>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shepherd L, O'Carroll RE, Ferguson E. An International Comparison of Deceased and Living Organ Donation/Transplant Rates in Opt-in and Opt-out Systems: A Panel Study. *BMC Med*. 2014;12(131).

^{iv} Halpern SD, Ubel PA, Asch DA. Harnessing the Power of Default Options to Improve Health Care. *N Engl J Med*. 2007;357:1340-1344.

^v Peters J, et al. Using Healthy Defaults in Walt Disney World Restaurants to Improve Nutritional Choices. *J Assoc Consum Res*. 2016;1(1):92-103.

^{vi} Anzman-Frasca S, et al. Orders of Healthier Children's Items Remain High More than Two Years after Menu Changes at a Regional Restaurant Chain. *Health Aff (Millwood)*. 2015;34(11):1885-1892.

^{vii} Kuhn S, Ihmels M, Kutzner F. Organic defaults in online-shopping: Immediate effects but no spillover to similar choices. *J Consum Behav*. 2021;20:271-287.