



## **Nutrition From a Kid's Perspective: Sending The Right Messages to Kids & Moms**

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**“Everybody’s” engaged in the childhood obesity issue, but what about kids themselves?**

**Kids have a huge say  
on what goes into their mouths!**

**So, we decided to find out what kids themselves thought.**

# We Talk To, and Listen To, Kids and Moms



# We Talk To, and Listen To, Kids and Moms

- We know today's Gen X-aged moms
- We understand what motivates and inspires kids
- In just the last two years, Strottman's Insights department has conducted:
  - Over one hundred focus groups of kids and moms
  - Separately, over 50 "Circle of Friends" discussions held in moms' living rooms
  - Over one hundred individual in-restaurant family and server interviews
  - As well as many one-on-one interviews, in-home family ethnographies, family Dine-alongs, and mom/kid pair Shop-alongs

# “Nutrition From A Kid’s Perspective” Study

- **Winter, 2003 online survey of 500 kids ages 8-12**
- **Strottman Kid Engineer Groups**
  - 6 groups (total of 40 kids)
  - Atlanta, GA & Orange County, CA
- **Strottman Gatekeeper Mom Groups**
  - 4 groups (total of 23 parents)
- **April, 2004 survey sponsored by Subway (proprietary, only sharing publicly-released results here)**
  - Online survey of 2,682 kids ages 5-12
  - In-person discussions with 50 Strottman Kid Engineers ages 6-12
- 2005-present: Strottman has continued to talk to both moms and kids regularly on this subject



STROTTMAN



# What Kids Told Us About Nutrition

# What's the Fuss?

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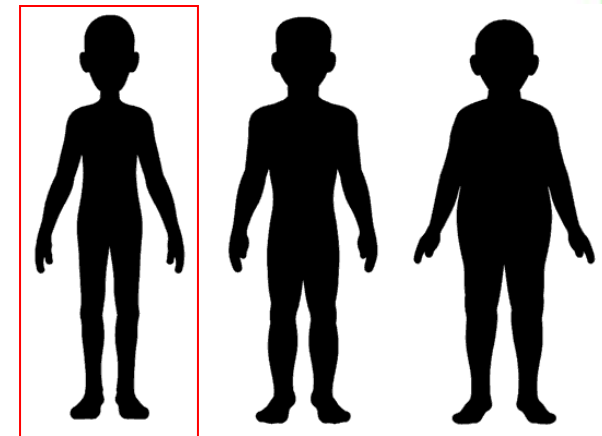
They're not sure what all the fuss is about, or they don't care . . . yet

- They care only for Mom's sake, not necessarily for "health's sake"
  - 63% of kids said eating healthy food "will make my mom/dad happy"
- Weak connection between not eating healthy and becoming overweight
  - Kids say "Getting sick" is the worst consequence (41%) of not eating healthy food
    - "Sick" = minor ailments
- "Becoming overweight" is seen as far less of an issue (only 20% say it's the "worst consequence" of not eating healthy), just slightly more than getting a stomach ache (16%)



# What's the Fuss?

- Being thin = Being sick
- “Getting sick a lot” was the top characteristic associated with being *underweight* (64%), but only the third-highest associated with being overweight (33%)
  - Stereotypes prevail. Children strongly associate overweight body figures with kids who are picked on (73%) and as having funny personalities (48%)
- Sickness/disease is not associated strongly with obesity in kids' and tweens' minds.
  - Social (vs. health) benefits of avoiding obesity will be more effective short term



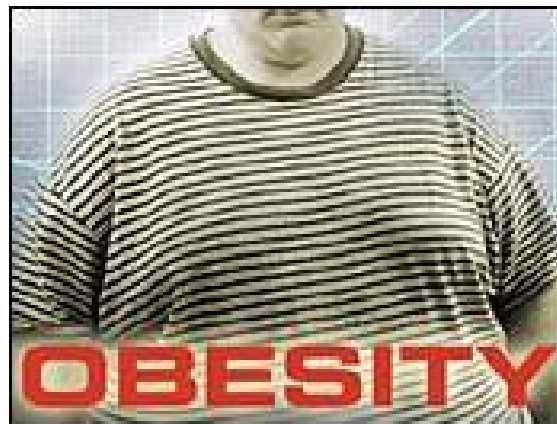
Photos not intended for publication - © 2004 Getty Images and respective copyright holders.

# What's the Fuss?

- Unaware
  - Among self-described overweight kids
    - 64% consider themselves *very or pretty healthy*
    - 70% have never been on a diet
  - Among overweight kids (5-12)
    - 25% believe they are “about the right weight”
    - 38% of their parents believe their child is “about the right weight”

# What's the Fuss?

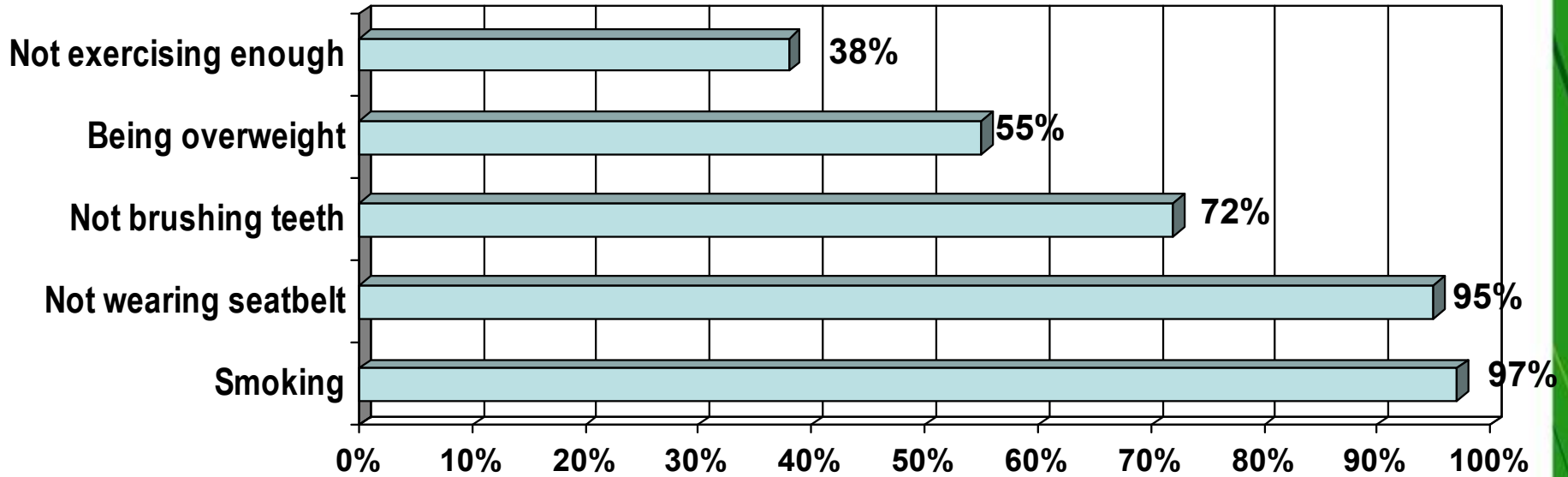
- A part of their everyday lives . . .
  - Eight in ten kids (5-12) say they know someone who is “very overweight”
- But . . .
  - Only 39% think that person is worried about his/her condition
  - Only 20% are worried about that person
  - 20% think it's “OK” that the person is overweight because “he/she is happy”



# What's the Fuss?

- Sedentary lifestyle and Obesity rank low in “dangerousness”

Conditions Kids (5-12) Believe Are Dangerous



# What's the Fuss?

- Implications
  - Negative consequence motivators will have a steep hill to climb
  - Consider how analogies to promoting dental health and recycling are relevant (i.e. consequences kids could understand; getting parents, schools, government, business all involved, etc.)
  - Sickness is not associated strongly with obesity in kids' minds.
    - Social (vs. health) benefits of avoiding obesity will be more effective short term

# **“Healthy” Tastes Bad**

# “Healthy” Tastes Bad

- Taste matters to kids more than anything else
- “Healthy” foods are *perceived* by kids as failing on this key attribute
- (So obvious, yet constantly forgotten)



# “Healthy” Tastes Bad

Some Kid Engineer thoughts:

“When you eat something that is *nutritious*, it tastes *disgusting*, but when you eat something that’s *not nutritious*, it tastes *awesome*.”

“Anything that looks really *ugly and bad*, then I think *that’s nutritious*.”

“Kids like the un-nutritious stuff because the *healthy* stuff is kind of *yucky*.”





# “Healthy” Tastes Bad

- “Tastes good” is at the bottom on the list of characteristics kids ascribe to healthy foods

Good for my heart	84%
Has lots of vitamins	84%
Keeps me from getting sick	79%
Will make me smart	72%
Will help me do well in school	70%
Will help me do well in sports	65%
Gives me energy	64%

Will make mom/dad happy	63%
Won't make me fat	62%
Is low in cholesterol	57%
Is low in sugar	53%
Makes me happy	37%
Will make me thin	33%
<b>Tastes good</b>	<b>32%</b>

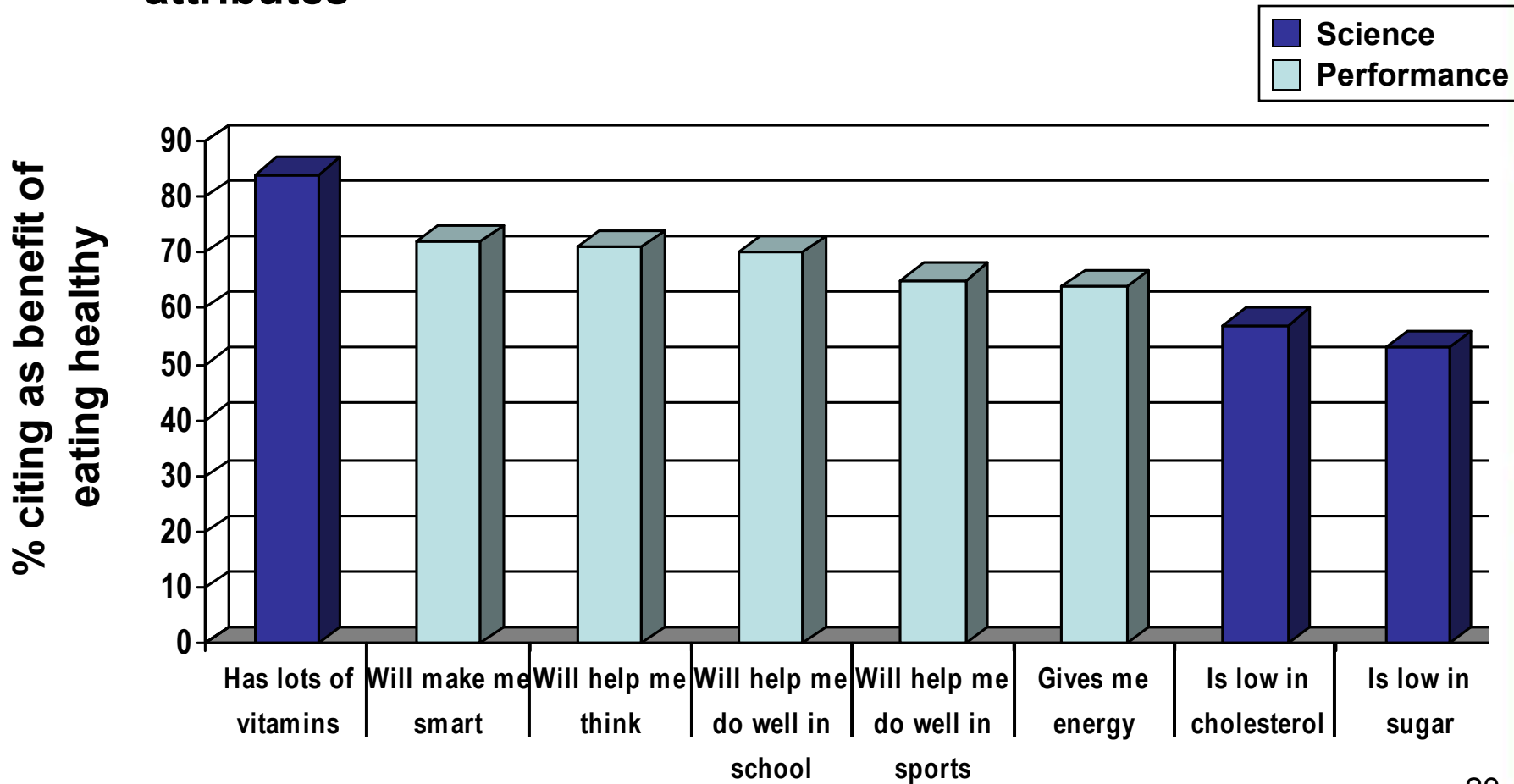
# “Healthy” Tastes Bad

- Implication
  - Strict focus on health and nutrition will work against us
    - Kids will instinctively resist foods and beverages marketed as “healthy”

# **Kids Care About “Performance” More Than Science**

# It's About Performance

- Kids often named “performance” benefits as key attributes of “very healthy” foods – often more than scientific/chemical attributes



# It's About Performance

- Kid Engineers asked to name reasons to eat nutritious foods
  - “They give your **body energy** and help you through the day”
  - “So you can **run fast**, stay in shape, **see better**”
  - “Certain foods give you **brain power**”
- The consequences of not eating healthy
  - “Makes you **slow in soccer.**”
  - “You **can't do the stuff you like to do**, like you **can't run as fast** or be the fastest runner.”
  - “You get so **tired** that you couldn't really do anything.”

# It's About Performance

- When performance isn't needed, they regress:

*"I eat healthy before my games, but I eat junk food every time I get a chance... if I eat good before my games it won't slow me down and I'll be more focused"*

Their outlook is SO short term, to the point where even those kids that do have some consciousness of eating healthy totally abandon any sense they do have if it's a weekend during which they don't have a soccer game.

# It's About Performance

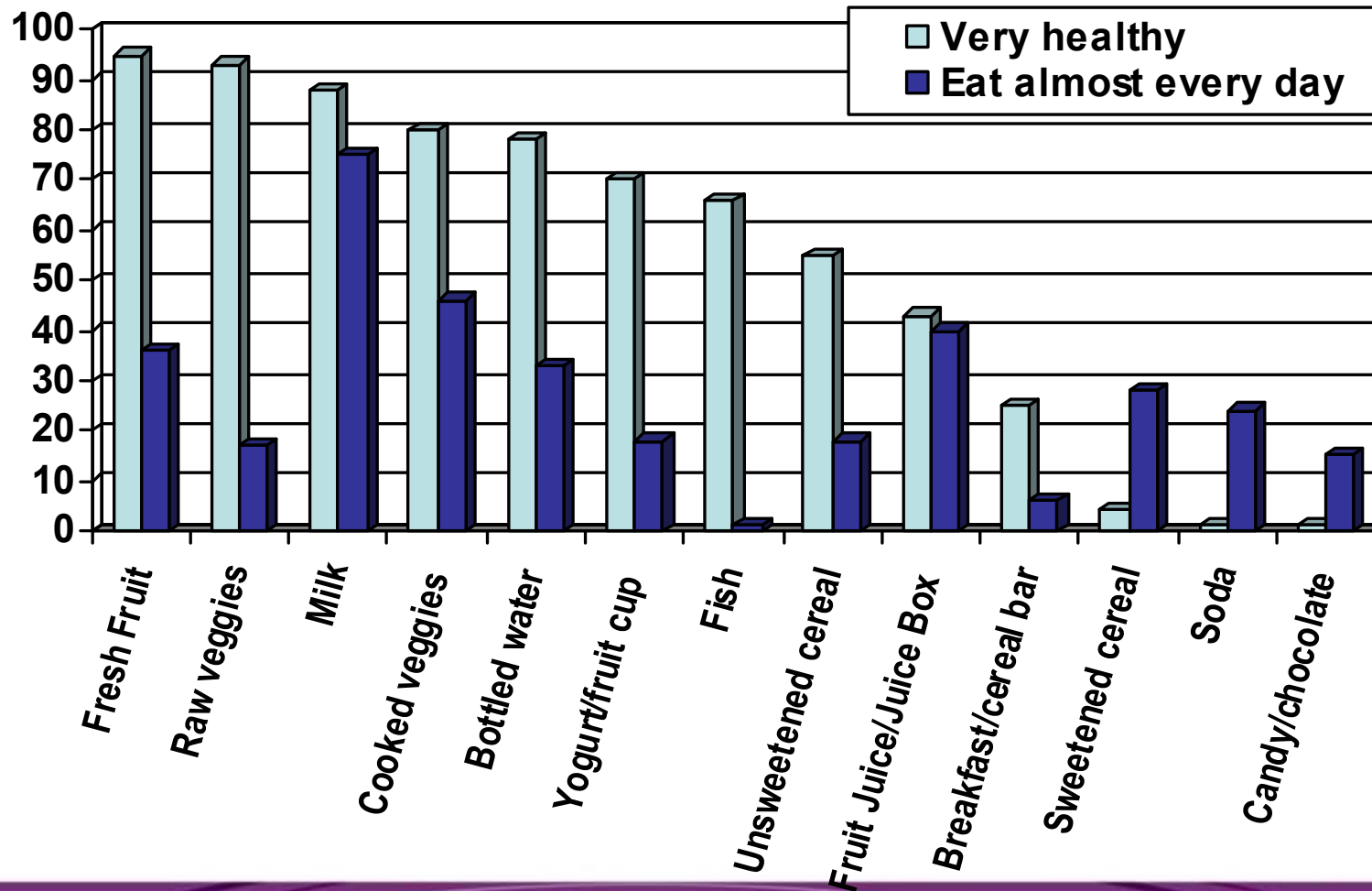
- Immediate performance is the benefit
  - Not nutrition
  - Not health
  - Not a long life
- Provide instant gratification or benefit
  - Athletic prowess/competitive success
  - Mental acuity/academic accomplishment
  - Energy to live life
  - Appearance/social conformance

**Just Because They're Taught  
Doesn't Mean They Understand**



# Kids Know What's Healthy, But They Don't Eat Healthily

Kids' ratings of what they believe is "very healthy" vs. what kids say they "eat almost every day"



# Just Because They're Taught Doesn't Mean They Understand

- They know some of the nutrition lingo

*“Nutritious means food has **vitamins and protein.**”*

*“**Not fattening,** and you should eat more of it because it is better for you.”*

*“Healthy means that it **doesn't have a lot of sugar.**”*

*“Nutritious food helps you grow tall and be healthy and junk food is **just calories that turn into fat.**”*

# Just Because They're Taught Doesn't Mean They Understand

- Much of their knowledge about nutrition is unusable to them
  - How much sugar is “too much” sugar?
  - Same question for fat, calories, cholesterol?
- Nutrition is complex and information can be contradictory
  - They hear: “Fat is bad”. Then they hear there are “good fats” and “bad fats”, but even “good fats” can be bad if you eat too much of them. Huh?
  - They hear: “Fruit is good; it’s natural; it’s a healthy snack. But fruit juice has sugar. It’s not the same kind of sugar as in candy, but fruit juice still has a lot of sugar so really drinking water is best.” Huh?
- Kids need SIMPLE rules to follow



# Just Because They're Taught Doesn't Mean They Understand

- Implications
  - Knowledge does not necessarily translate into action
  - Understand trade-offs and compromise of healthful/indulgent behaviors
  - Messages received are
    - Way too numerous
    - Inconsistent (or conflicting)
    - Not consistently motivating or compelling

# The most important meal of the day is the least healthy

- Breakfast is the “JumpStart” meal
- Mornings are hectic – the focus is getting ready and out the door
- Quotes from moms:

“Breakfast time in my household is really unorganized. I wish it was like on the commercials when the family's all sitting together, but it's not.”

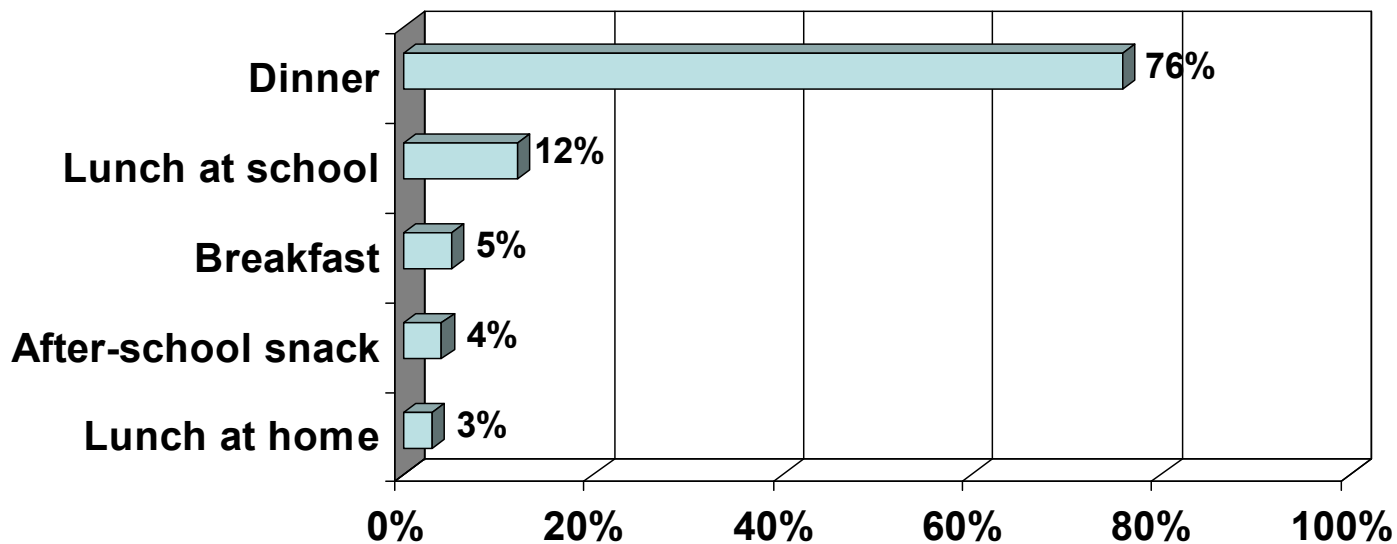
“We had frozen waffles with chocolate chips, except my 17 year old had rice & beans with salsa and I made an egg burrito with hash browns, turkey, and cheese for my daughter. My 3 middle kids eat at the same time and my daughter takes her food with her when she goes to high school.”

“My kids will not eat breakfast, so if I can get them to eat a pastry while standing up watching a cartoon then that's OK as long as they eat something.”

# Other Than Dinner, It's a "Free-for-all"

- Kids are most likely to eat healthy foods at dinner

**"When do you usually eat healthy food?"**



- The reason? Moms prepare dinners 89% of the time, is firmly in control, and parents are there to "enforce"

# Breakfast is the “JumpStart” Meal

- As a result, breakfast is reportedly the least healthy meal of the day

“When do you usually eat healthy foods?”

Dinner	76%
Lunch at school	12%
<b>Breakfast</b>	<b>5%</b>

# Breakfast is the “JumpStart” Meal

- Meanwhile, breakfast is the meal most likely to be prepared by kids

**Percent of the time kids reported preparing their own...**

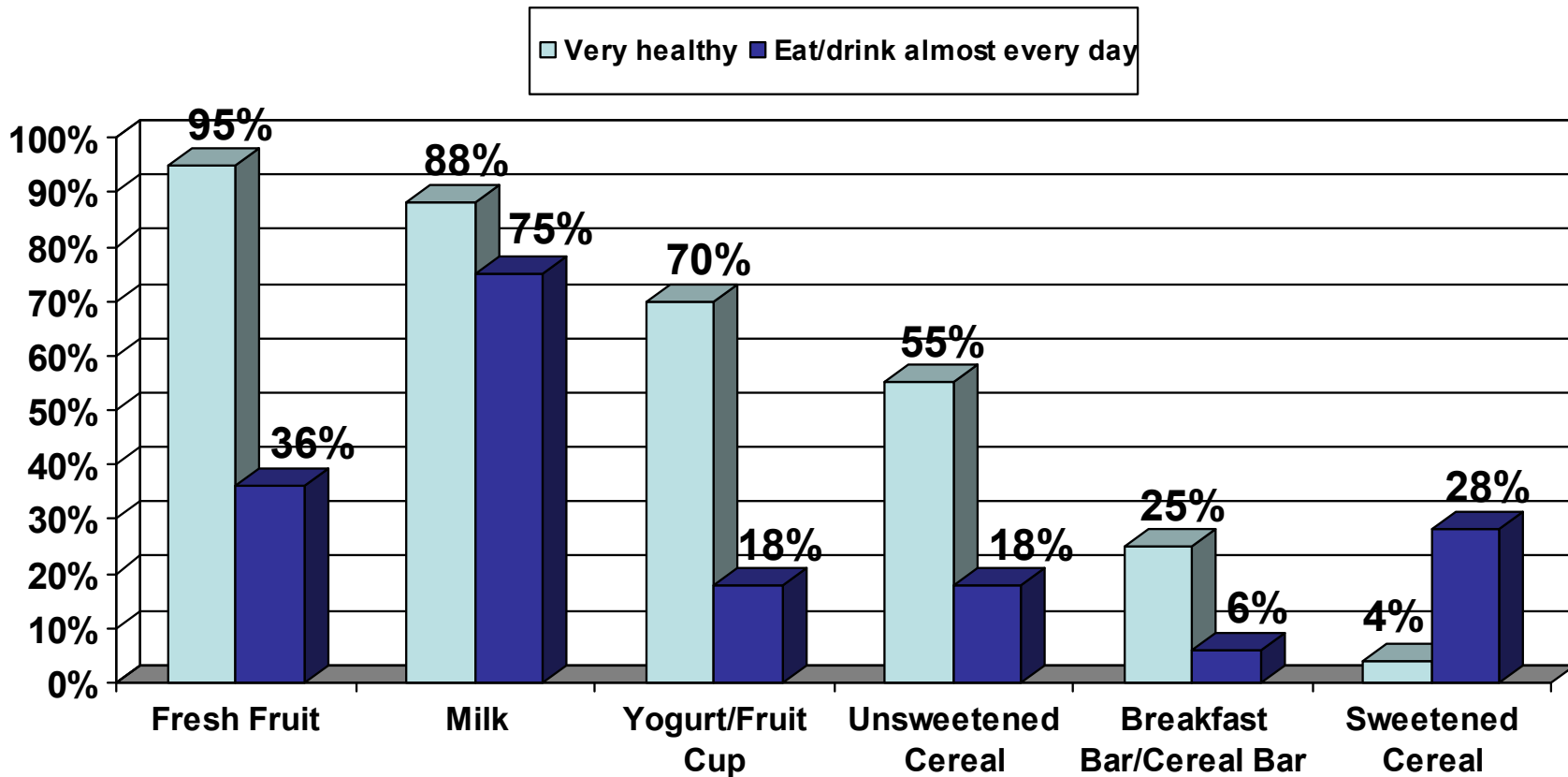
Breakfast	32%
Lunch (for school or home)	15%
Dinner	1%



# Breakfast is the “JumpStart” Meal

- They’re not choosing the healthiest options (except milk)

Kids’ ratings of what they believe is “very healthy” vs. what kids say they “eat almost every day”



# Breakfast is the “JumpStart” Meal

- Implications
  - Breakfast represents a significant opportunity to change kid’s eating habits
  - Challenge is to overcome the basic *personality* of today’s “family breakfast”, which has become counter-nutritional
    - Faced with such a plethora of pre-packaged breakfast bars, moms seem to easily forget about simple breakfast options like yogurt or cereal with fresh fruit

# **It's Got To Be A Family Affair**

# Family Affair

- Parents are key role models, but many do a poor job in *modeling* healthy behaviors
  - Family is kids' primary source for healthy learning (88% said it was)
    - 82% of kids said Mom was biggest influence
  - Most kids agree that their parents eat healthier than they do, but:
    - 33% of kids say that their parents do not exercise at all
    - 50% say their parents exercise two days a week or less

# Family Affair

- Implications
  - A dual (or even triple) targeted message is needed
    - What is Dad's role?
      - The typical dad spends 6.5 hours a week with his children--far less time than the typical mom--though more than the 2.6 hours weekly that men devoted to their families in 1978
  - An emphasis on *family* commitment and action is essential
    - “Do as I do”
    - “Secondary” benefit – addressing adult obesity

# **What Kinds Of Nutrition Messages Are Most Likely To Resonate With Today's Kids & Parents?**

# Messaging Opportunities

## Some key insights:

1. Mom and family are the biggest influencers when it comes to health and wellness from a kids perspective.
2. Kids care about *performance* more than the *science* of nutrition.
  - To them, there is no “crisis” surrounding their health and well being.
  - Long-term negative consequences do not have *nearly* the power of short-term advantages

# Implications for Messaging

## Mom and Family is the Biggest Influencer

- Different messages are needed for moms and kids
- Mom and Dad need to understand *eating well starts at home*
- Communicating to Mom/Dad the power and influence they have is a crucial
  - Parents have to understand they have significant responsibility—they are role models, motivators and must lead by example. Their kids look up to them and ultimately want to make them happy.



# Implications for Messaging

## Kids Care About Performance

- Short term, explaining the science of nutrition and the negative long term health effects of obesity are beyond kids (and many Moms!)
- Kids want to know how eating healthy links to things they can relate to, like not getting sick or being able to perform better in school or sports.
- The right messaging can link nutrition and eating well to things kids care about, like not missing out on fun things, thinking better, running faster, jumping higher, feeling energized.

# Implications for Messaging

Remember these old tenet's when talking to kids (and moms):

Don't label any foods as "bad"—there are no bad foods, there are only bad eating habits

- Labeling certain foods as "good" or "bad" trivializes the importance of nutrition and of eating WELL

There is an appropriate occasion for all kinds of food, and communicating that certain foods are for certain occasions is, in most cases, a good message to send to kids and parents! Examples:

- Have a corn dog when you're at a carnival
- Have a cupcake when you're at a birthday party (even at school!)
- Have a little extra stuffing and a slice of pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving

# There Are No “Bad Foods” As Long As Portions Remain In Check

**100 CALORIE**  
POUCHES

**Kid Sense**  
FUN PACKS



# High Priority Messaging

Kids don't understand energy balance and balance in general. But they do understand and desire better performance.

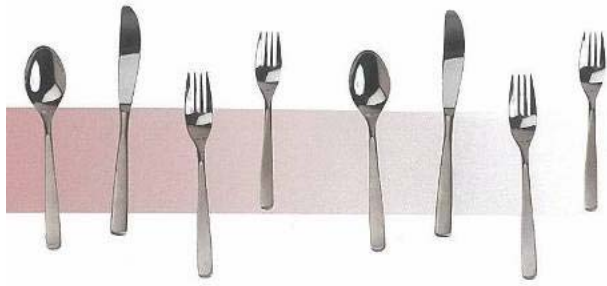
Kid messaging opportunities:

- Food in, energy out.
- Be balanced, food and activity need to be in sync, they go hand and hand.
- Balance goes both ways: whenever you eat be active, whenever you're active, you need to eat.
- Making smart choices can improve your perform -- jump higher, think better, run faster!

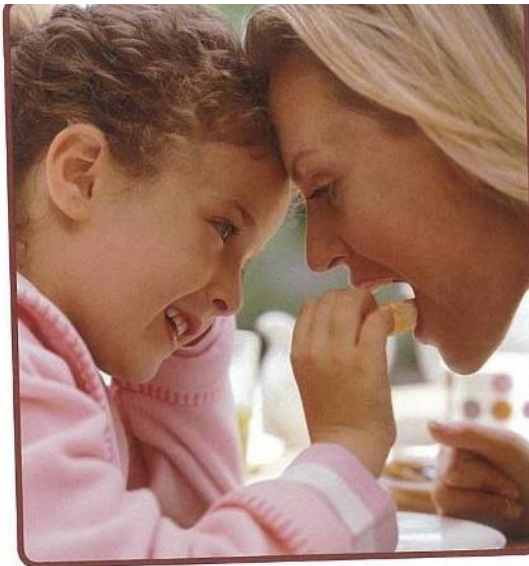
# Clear Message: Specific Benefit

- Unless you're selling a packaged food at retail, don't stress over how solid the science is on a healthy food's specific benefits
- Even if scientific linkages are tenuous, specific benefit messages give consumers a reason to want to consumer these healthy foods
- Examples
  - Carrots → Eyesight
  - Spinach → Strength
  - Bananas → Energy
  - Milk → Bones
- Consider whether your clients might respond better to learning about healthy foods by their potential specific benefits

# A Key To Eating Better Is Eating More SLOWLY!



*Dinnertime* is a great way to slow down from the day's hectic pace and connect with your family. *Strotzman* can help you serve up a delicious meal with easy-to-prepare foods and beverages that your family will love. From entrées made with the highest quality ingredients, to nutritious drinks to yummy desserts, *Strotzman* helps make it easy to make a big deal out of dinner, and yet makes preparing dinner no big deal at all!



## Dinner "Did You Know"

When you eat with your children, it's more likely that they'll eat **healthier foods** and **more balanced meals!**

Regularly sitting down for a meal with your children is one way to **connect** with them and be **involved** with what is happening in their lives.!

## A Little Dinner Conversation

Every dinner is a great story waiting to happen. These fun conversation starters help you create your own AND help you really get to know how your family thinks.



What's the **most interesting** thing that happened to you today?



What three **famous people**, past or present, would you most like to **have dinner with** and why?

# Talking To Your Clients:

## Parents Must Understand Their Kids Will Do What They Do

Parents underestimate, downplay, don't understand, and don't realize the importance of their role in the equation. They are sending mixed messages and setting a bad example.

Mom and Dad messaging opportunities:

- Encourage and motivate their children to be more active and engage in physical play. Play should include the whole family.
- There are no enemies—food nor exercise—you balance both to be healthy and happy.
- Teach kids about choice, different situations require different choices. Making a smart choice can enhance performance.
- Size matters. Teaching kids about portion size, and serving them the right portion size, is a BIG step in the right direction.
- Mom and Dad can't just talk the talk, they have to walk the walk. It is a family affair; actions speak louder than words.

# Talking to Your Clients: Positive vs. Negative Tone and Vocabulary

- Positive:
  - Not just what to do but how to do it
  - Specific
  - Solution-oriented
    - What happens if you do
  - “Balance”
  - “Guidance”
  - “Moderation”/Sometimes
  - “Fuel”
  - “Influence”/“By example”
- Negative :
  - Passive
  - Vague
  - Accusatory
    - What happens if you don’t
  - “Always”
  - “Don’t”
  - “Bad food”
  - Scientific sounding
  - Condescending



# Examples of Simple, Effective Messages

- “Get up and Play an Hour a Day.”
- “Eat Well. Play Hard. Make it balance.”
- “The Amount Counts: Keep portions under control”
- “Are you eating a home run or a strikeout?”



# U.S. Ad Council's Coalition for Healthy Children

- <http://www.adcouncil.org/healthychildren/messages.html>



## Coalition for Healthy Children: *Combating Childhood Obesity*

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### About

The Coalition for Healthy Children's goal is to help address the obesity crisis that confronts our nation and its children. Our mission is to provide clear, consistent, research-based messages to children and parents on the importance of practicing a healthier lifestyle and offer them the means to do it.



#### Messages for Adults

Teach kids about choice, different situations require different choices.  
Making a smart choice can enhance performance. [read more](#)



#### Messages for Kids

Food in, energy out.  
Making smart choices can improve your performance. [read more](#)

# Don't Forget...

- **Kids care about performance more than the science of nutrition.**
  - **To them, there is no “obesity epidemic”**
  - **Long-term negative consequences do not have *nearly* the power of short-term advantages**
- **Encourage moms to get kids involved in making better nutrition choices by giving them simple guidelines and meaningful (*to them*) reasons to care**
- **There are no bad foods, there are only bad eating habits**
- **Mom is THE single biggest influencer when it comes to health and wellness from a kids perspective**



## Thank You!

For questions or comments, please contact:

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