

McDonald's moves cheeseburgers off Happy Meal menu

February 15 2018, by Joseph Pisani



A \$3 Happy Meal is advertised at a McDonald's restaurant in Brandon, Miss., Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2018. McDonald's will soon banish cheeseburgers and chocolate milk from its Happy Meal menu in an effort to cut down on the

calories, sodium, saturated fat and sugar that kids consume at its restaurants. Diners can still ask specifically for cheeseburgers or chocolate milk with the kid's meal, but the fast-food company said that not listing them will reduce how often they're ordered. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

McDonald's is taking cheeseburgers and chocolate milk off its Happy Meal menu in an effort to cut down on the calories, sodium, saturated fat and sugar that kids consume at its restaurants.

Diners can still ask specifically for cheeseburgers or chocolate milk with the kid's meal, but the fast-food company said that not listing them will reduce how often they're ordered. Since it removed soda from the Happy Meal menu four years ago, orders for it with Happy Meals have fallen 14 percent, the company said. Hamburgers and Chicken McNuggets will remain the main entrees on the Happy Meal menu.

The Happy Meal, which has been around for nearly 40 years, has long been a target of health advocates and parents who link it to childhood obesity. McDonald's has made many tweaks over the years, including cutting the size of its fries and adding fruit. Most recently, it swapped out its apple juice for one that has less sugar.

It's been especially important as the company tries to shake its junk-food image, since McDonald's is known for getting more business from families with children relative to its traditional rivals, such as Burger King and Wendy's. McDonald's doesn't say how much revenue it makes from the \$3 Happy Meal, but the company said 30 percent of all visits come from families.



A Happy Meal featuring non-fat chocolate milk and a cheeseburger with fries, are arranged for a photo at a McDonald's restaurant in Brandon, Miss., Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2018. McDonald's will soon banish cheeseburgers and chocolate milk from its Happy Meal menu. Diners can still ask specifically for cheeseburgers or chocolate milk with the kid's meal, but the fast-food company said that not listing them will reduce how often they're ordered. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

McDonald's will make the changes, including new nutritional standards for the Happy Meal changes, by June in the United States.

"It's a good step in the right direction," said Margo Wootan, the vice president for nutrition at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "We would love to see many more restaurants do the same."

McDonald's said Thursday that it wants all its Happy Meal options to have 600 calories or fewer and have less than 650 milligrams of sodium.

It also wants less than 10 percent of the meal's calories to come from saturated fat and the same percentage to come from added sugar.



A portion of a drive thru menu panel featuring Happy Meals is seen at a McDonald's Restaurant in Ridgeland, Miss., on Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2018. The company will soon banish cheeseburgers and chocolate milk from its Happy Meal menu in an effort to cut down on the calories, sodium, saturated fat and sugar that kids consume at its restaurants. Diners can still ask specifically for cheeseburgers or chocolate milk with the kid's meal, but the fast-food company said that not listing them will reduce how often they're ordered. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

The cheeseburger and chocolate milk didn't meet those new standards, the Oak Brook, Illinois-based company said. It is, however, working to cut sugar from the chocolate milk and believes it'll be back on the Happy Meal menu eventually—but doesn't know when that will happen.

Trudy Munk, a mother of three from Lombard, Illinois, who was at a McDonald's with her 3-year-old niece on Thursday, said she wasn't sure if the changes would make much of a difference.

"I just feel like if you are coming to McDonalds, you're not necessarily looking for the healthiest option," she said. "I see it as a treat and I don't mind getting my kids French fries or the cheeseburgers."



This April 24, 2017, photo shows a McDonalds signs at a restaurant in downtown Pittsburgh. McDonald's will soon banish cheeseburgers and chocolate milk from its Happy Meal menu in an effort to get kids to eat less calories, sodium, saturated fat and sugar at its restaurants. (AP Photo/Keith Srakocic)

There will be other tweaks: The six-piece chicken nugget Happy Meal will now come with a kids-sized fries instead of a small, lowering

calories and sodium from the fries by half. And bottled water will be added as an option to the Happy Meal menu, but will cost extra. Currently, the Happy Meal menu lists milk, chocolate milk and apple juice. Soda does not cost extra.

For international restaurants, McDonald's Corp. said that at least half of the Happy Meal options available must meet its new nutritional guidelines. The company said some are adding new menu items to comply, like in Italy, where a grilled chicken sandwich was added to the Happy Meal menu.

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Citation: McDonald's moves cheeseburgers off Happy Meal menu (2018, February 15) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-02-mcdonald-slims-happy-meal-banishing.html>

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