

Healthful food for children is the same as for adults

January 6 2022



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It is the position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) that there is no difference between healthful foods for adults and for children aged 2 and older, except for age-appropriate

adjustments in texture and portion size, according to a new position paper in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

"If you think about kids' [food](#), the archetype or terminology that we widely use to describe the food that we feed our [children](#), it's really a social norm or societal construct that we've perpetuated," says Pamela Rothpletz-Puglia, EdD, RD, School of Health Professions, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, NJ.

Kids' food is operationally defined as food likely to be consumed by children aged 2–14 years, either at home or in the community. There is a long-held belief in the United States that children need different types of foods than adults, and many of these foods are highly processed; energy-dense; and high in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar. A diet favoring these foods can have significant detrimental effects on children's preferences and tastes, may exacerbate food neophobia or picky eating behavior sometimes seen in children, and may impact their health in the future.

In the position paper, the authors note that the idea that children need different foods than adults seems to have originated during the alcohol prohibition era when the hospitality industry created children's menus to offset the loss of alcohol sales revenue. Since then it is known that children over 2 years of age can eat the same healthy foods as adults, but kids' food and menus have become a social norm. This social norm persists because ultra-processed foods like chicken tenders, hot dogs, French fries, and grilled cheese are prevalent in the food environment and they are highly palatable to children.

Nutrition educators play key roles in shifting consumer demand and social norms about food choices. They can do this by creating family and community resilience and healthy adaptation to the ultra-processed food environment, and by promoting the knowledge that children over the age

of 2 can eat the same healthy foods as adults eat (while accounting for age-appropriate and nutrition requirements). They can also help improve the unhealthy aspects of the kids' food archetype by working with the media, restaurant industry, and [policy makers](#) on health promotion messaging, marketing, menu labeling, and healthy default menu options. By shifting norms about kids' food toward [healthy food](#) that both adults and children can enjoy, nutrition educators can promote healthy social and behavior changes at the individual, family, community, and societal levels.

"I think we need to partner with communities, the food industry, and policy makers," says Rothpletz-Puglia. "We need to partner and create mutually beneficial solutions."

More information: Position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior: Healthful Food for Children is the Same as Adults, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2021.09.007](#)

Provided by Elsevier

Citation: Healthful food for children is the same as for adults (2022, January 6) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-healthful-food-children-adults.html>

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