Medical Xpress

Only one-third of parents think they are doing a good job helping kids eat healthy

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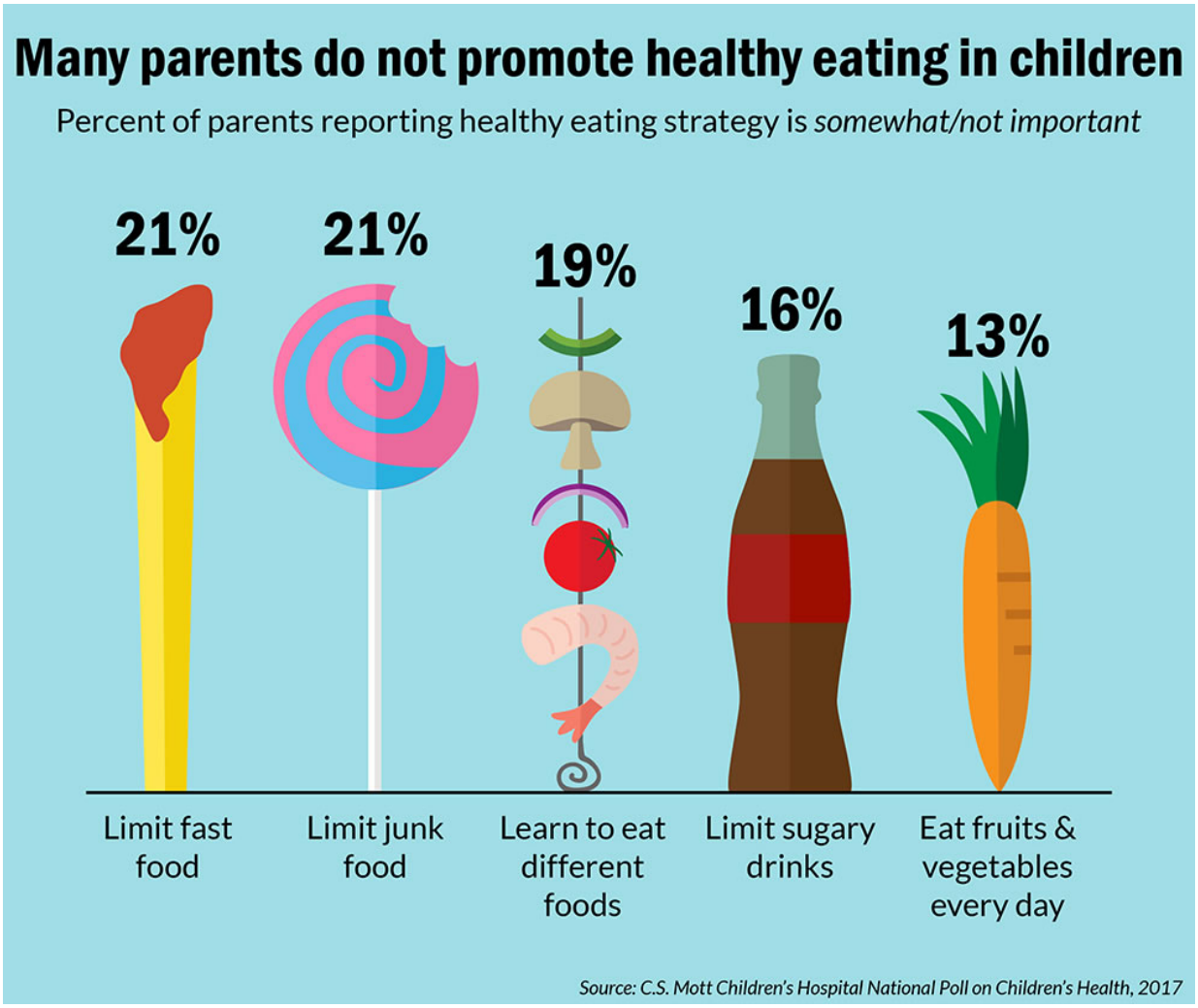

Many parents do not promote healthy eating in kids, according to this month's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at the University of Michigan. Credit: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

If you know healthy eating is important for your kids but you also feel like it's easier said than done, you're not alone.

Nearly all parents agree with the importance of healthy diets during childhood, according to a new national poll. But when it comes to their own homes, only a third of parents of children ages 4-18 are confident they are doing a good job shaping their child's eating habits.

While a little more than half of parents polled believe their children eat mostly healthy, only one in six rate their children's diets as very nutritious, according to the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health. Meanwhile, about a fourth of parents say their child's eating is somewhat or not healthy at all.

Common challenges get in the way: Price, picky eaters and convenience.

"Most parents understand that they should provide healthy food for their children, but the reality of work schedules, children's activities and different food preferences can make meal preparation a hectic and frustrating experience," says poll co-director Sarah Clark.

"The tension between buying foods children like, and buying foods that are healthy, can be an ongoing struggle. Many of us know the feeling of spending time and money on a healthy meal only to have our children grimace at the sight of it and not take a single bite."

Most parents polled agree it's important to promote a healthy diet for their children. Still, one in five don't think it's important to limit fast food and junk food in their child's diet. Another 16 percent believe it is somewhat or not important to limit sugary drinks.

In general, parents of teens were less worried about unhealthy eating habits compared to parents of younger children.

"It can be easy to slip into more convenient habits that seem less stressful and less expensive. But if occasional fast food or junk food becomes the norm, it will be even more difficult to promote healthy habits for kids as they grow up," Clark says.

"Many convenience foods are high in sugar, fat and calories and overconsumption of fast food can cause childhood obesity and other health problems."

Another hurdle: The often overwhelming quest to shop healthy. Nearly half of parents polled admit that it is difficult to tell which foods are actually good for them. Phrases such as all-natural, low-fat, organic, and sugar-free are used inconsistently on food labels and packaging and can be confusing for shoppers.

Additionally, about one in four parents say healthy foods are not available where they shop, a challenge which is more prominent among parents with lower education and income levels.

"Most parents want their children to eat as healthy as possible but may need help making that happen," Clark says. "Some parents need help with shopping, meal preparation, or other household chores so that mealtimes are not so hectic. Others would benefit from easy-to-understand information on how to identify packaged foods that are healthy, ideas on how to make kid-friendly recipes a little healthier, and practical suggestions on convincing picky eaters to try a more balanced diet."

This report is based on responses from 1,767 parents who had at least one child age 4-18 years.

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More information: Read the full Mott Poll report: mottnpch.org/reports-surveys/h … not-following-recipe

Provided by University of Michigan

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