

Kids' restaurant meals need slimming down: nutritionists

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(HealthDay)—Most items offered on children's menus at major restaurant chains in the United States have too many calories, a new study finds.

Fifteen child nutrition experts who were consulted for the study recommended a maximum of 300 calories in main dishes for children, such as a burger or serving of macaroni and cheese.

But the average calorie counts for those items on menus at the nation's top 200 restaurant chains were 465 and 442, respectively, according to the findings by the RAND Corp., an independent health policy research organization.

Other maximum calorie recommendations from the nutritionists included: 100 tops for a serving of fried potatoes; 150 for soups, appetizers and snacks; 110 calories for unflavored milk; and 150 calories for vegetables and salads that included added sauces.

The nutritionists put no limit on vegetables and

fruits without added oils or sauces. The entire meal should not have more than 600 calories, the nutritionists said.

The item that most often exceeded the calorie guidelines? Fried potatoes, which averaged 287 calories, nearly triple the recommended amount.

The findings highlight the importance of planned calorie labeling on restaurant menus, the researchers said.

"It's important to examine the caloric value of what kids are served because the chances are they will eat all or most of what they are served," study lead author Deborah Cohen, a senior natural scientist, said in a RAND news release.

"Overeating—consuming more [calories](#) than are needed for normal growth and maintenance—is a very common problem and a key contributing factor to childhood obesity," she said.

Calories in children's menu items are important because American youngsters eat out often. On any given day, one-third of children and 41 percent of teens eat at fast-food outlets, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study findings were published online recently in the journal *Nutrition Today*.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [nutrition](#).

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