

## Building Blocks for a Healthier Tomorrow

*Ohio Healthy Programs provides the framework needed to establish healthy guidelines in child care homes.*

With a culture focused on accessibility and convenience, fast food intake and processed meals have become a central aspect to daily life in America. According to the Statistic Brain Research Institute, the fast industry generates revenue of \$110 billion annually. With approximately 160,000 fast food restaurants in the US, more than 50 million people are visiting these restaurants daily. In fact, 44% of Americans visit a fast restaurant at least one day a week [1]. It is easy to see how the fast food industry has entrenched itself in American culture for years to come. With excessive caloric consumption through these high calorie meals, it is no surprise that obesity continues to rise among children and adults alike.

Portion sizing, advertising and marketing all play a key role into developing unhealthy and unsustainable lifestyle behaviors. Over the years, serving sizes have grown substantially without the public's knowledge. For example, a bagel 20 years ago would measure around a 3-inch diameter, providing the consumer 140 calories per serving. Fast forward to present day, a Panera bagel is approximately 6 inches in diameter and provides the consumer roughly 430 calories per serving [2]. That is a difference of 290 calories per serving, a 207% increase!

Advertising and marketing play critical roles in driving consumer consumption. In 2015, it was determined that children on average view candy advertisements 10 to 20 times more often than advertisements for fruits and vegetables. Average yearly advertisement viewings are shown in Table 1 [3].

<i>Ages</i>	<i>Candy</i>	<i>Fruits &amp; Vegetables</i>
<i>2 – 11 Years Old</i>	476	45
<i>12 – 17 Years Old</i>	624	37

*Table 1: Average Annual Advertisements Viewed by Age Group*

With long work hours, limited finances and accessible fast, convenience food, people become vulnerable to building lifelong unhealthy habits. Particularly in food deserts where access is limited to healthy foods, families often feel defeated, believing they have no other choice. Through outreach and education we can forge a new future that strives to improve the community around us.

Child care providers are on the front lines of this issue and understand the plight that many families are facing. They are excellent resources to generate an environment where healthy eating behaviors become the norm. Child care providers understand the importance of taking steps to ensure their children receive the tools they need to live a healthier life. Providers are searching for programs that can help strengthen their knowledge of healthy eating. They understand the impact of incorporating the information they gain, and they want to put all that they have learned into action.

Through education, mentorship, and policy initiatives, Ohio Healthy Programs works with child care providers to create an environment that is focused on healthy eating behaviors and the promotion of physical activity.

This program sets off to accomplish this goal by developing an interactive curriculum that demonstrates simple, cost effective and healthy alternatives to daily practices. The program is comprised of the following four key components:

1. Module-Based Learning
2. In-Home Technical Assistant (TA) Meetings
3. Policy & Strategy Implementation
4. Certification

Providers are able to take online courses that are geared toward enhancing their knowledge while creating realistic opportunities to implement new healthy strategies. The modules cover a breadth of topics from healthy meal planning, healthy snack combinations, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, introduction of whole grain servings, and emphasis on water consumption. After completion of the modules, the Child Care providers receive, three personalized in-home meetings with their assigned technical assistant (TA). The TA reviews guidelines that help elevate a provider's menu and to help find easy modifications that are in line with the healthier guidelines. This might include limiting fried food options to once a week or a reduction in juice consumption. Gardening options and physical activity ideas are also discussed and reviewed.

Excessive caloric intake and unhealthy eating behaviors were central motivating factors as to why Caryla Pitts enrolled in Ohio Healthy Programs (OHP). Over the past 25 years, Caryla has been serving her community as an in-home child care provider and is currently caring for six children, ages five and up. Caryla thought she understood how healthy eating worked. It wasn't until a beloved family was diagnosed with cancer that the topic of health and wellbeing took center stage. After researching this debilitating condition, she realized how healthy eating can have a major impact on overall health and lead to prevention of many chronic health conditions.

She would be the first to admit that prior to OHP she did not pay attention to health standards or guidelines. After realizing her shortcomings, she dedicated her time to learning all she can do to improve the lives around her.

"As a young parent, throughout the years I did not really care too much about healthy eating," she explained. "But since I have become educated, I see how much food matters. I realize many of my parents don't really understand how bad some of the foods really are."

Realizing how unhealthy items have crept into her children's diet has become a motivating issue. Caryla has taken an active role in increasing her knowledge of healthy eating while educating the children in her care about how to make healthy substitutions in their diet. She has used her love for the outdoors as a teaching tool for her children and built a garden.

"I want to have my children see how fruit and vegetables are grown and use it as a teaching tool," she explained. Caryla understands that many of her children are not accustomed to eating a variety of fruits and vegetables. They lack the knowledge as to why these foods are essential in their diet.

Since growing a garden, several of her children have taken an active role by helping to water, harvest and prepare the vegetables. She has been very excited by the success of her garden and continues to

add variety - such cabbage and broccoli that will be used in meals and salads. Despite early success prior to OHP, Caryla admitted that negative habits and behaviors were still present on a daily basis.

Poor eating habits, minimal physical activity and limited communication had plagued Caryla's child care for years. Sugary beverages, snack foods, and highly processed meals were commonplace. Chocolate milk, juice or soda would be consumed on a daily basis. Parents would also reinforce this behavior by supplying these items daily at daycare and at home. Water held no significant value and became an afterthought. Fruits and vegetables were rarely offered at home, which increased the difficulty to offer them at daycare. Caryla desired for her kids to eat healthy, but she did not want to push the issue if they continuously refused.

Several of her children suffer from childhood obesity, and one child is underweight, requiring nutritional supplements. Caryla noted that in each case, the family followed very unhealthy eating patterns and was not considering the side effects of a poor diet. In addition, Caryla noted that exercise was minimal during the day, and the kids would prefer to play on the tablet or watch TV. Rarely did her children spend time outdoors. When encouraged to go outside, they wouldn't interact with each other. Caryla noted "It was almost like they had no idea how to play outside and would stand there, looking at me for ideas."

Since completing Ohio Healthy Programs, Caryla has found the inspiration she needed to create an environment that is focused on healthy eating and regular physical activity. A major influence during the program was the TA visits that she had with Michelle. She noted that those meetings left her feeling empowered and motivated to make a change. When reviewing her menus, Caryla said that Michelle crafted very simple ideas that left a major impact on her day care facility.

One recommendation was the removal of salt and the addition of spices to her foods.

"Michelle gave me a wonderful idea," Caryla said. "She gave me suggestions on how to use spices instead of salt. I thought there was no way it would taste good, but surprisingly it really did taste good. I realized that food is already seasoned with salt and I do not need to add more salt to foods." Since then, Caryla has been implementing different recipes with added spices that have livened up her foods and allowed for delicious taste profiles.

For cooking options, Caryla realized that her old menus promoted highly processed meals. She admitted that she would glance at food labels but would not pay much attention to the sodium, fat and cholesterol levels in foods. She believed that she was providing healthy, balanced meals. After reviewing labels and learning the nutrition facts she was shocked to learn how unhealthy these items were.

"It truly was an eye opening experience," she said. Caryla realized that she had been "double" frying her processed meats, adding to higher levels of fat and cholesterol. She has since begun to limit how many servings of processed meats are offered during the week. Her ultimate goal is to limit these serving to one time per week. She no longer fries her foods but places them in the oven to bake. These simple, easy changes can make a major impact in overall health and wellbeing.

When reviewing her beverage options, Caryla stated, “I never realized how much sugar is in certain items. I am now paying attention to the sugar content. A lot of things I thought were considered healthy, such as juice. I thought as long as it said 100% it was good; but when I asked Michelle, ‘Could a kid really get that much sugar in one serving of juice?’ she reemphasized ‘Water First for Thirst’ and it makes sense now. I don’t give any choice now. When they say I’m thirsty, water is the only thing I offer.”

Caryla has completely removed all sugary beverages from her menus, and she has discontinued offering juice and chocolate milk. She now emphasizes the importance of water intake and keeps fresh water available at all times of the day.

After implementing various guidelines, she has seen her children make tremendous strides to eat healthier and play more outside. Since implementing the 60+ minutes of physical activity rule, her children now go to a nearby park daily. She has been able to increase physical activity from zero minutes a day to a minimum of 45-60+ minutes daily. She has open communication with her children on why she implemented these new policies and how it will keep them healthier.

Caryla wants her children to not just eat healthy, but to know “why it is healthy and to want to eat healthy.” She has begun to teach her children about a variety of vegetables and continues to offer a variety of selections at meal time. She makes meal time a positive experience where the children are allowed to try new vegetables and fruits and experiment with tastes.

To help cement the implementation, she has posted her policies and has been firm in reinforcing the rules. Caryla has been a strong advocate to her parents and has been informing them directly of the changes she made to her menus and enforcing new guidelines. She has created a Parent Participation Board where she has posted all 13 healthy “Key Message” posters given during her TA visits. She understands that many of her parents are busy and on-the-go, but she plans to have meetings with each parent individually and have items sitting by the door that create a common ground with her parents to help implement healthy policies at home. She has also been also working with and educating parents on the importance of healthy eating at home.

Caryla plans to reenroll in Ohio Healthy Programs next year to continue developing her policies and elevating her menu standards. She stated, “You cannot go wrong with eating healthy and living a healthier lifestyle. Really, I appreciate your program. People need to be informed. What you eat is how you’re going to feel. You have to eat the right things to feel good and be healthy.”

Caryla said that the accessibility of the online modules and in-home TA visits were a positive aspect to the program. She found the modules to further strengthen her knowledge of the topic and the TA visits were very impactful and left a last impression. Caryla has big dreams for her program and desires to increase her knowledge on how to educate her children in making the healthy choice while at home or school.

When determination and goals align, our community around us will reap positive change. Caryla’s love for her children and the passion she has for healthy eating is an example that we should all try to emulate. She exemplifies our mission of striving to ensure that every child without access receives healthy food, nutrition education and physical activity. These impacts will have a lasting effect and will

continue to empower her children throughout their lives. We must continue to provide resources that empower our community to make positive changes in their lives and in the lives around them.

## REFERENCES

- [1] "Fast Food Eating Statistics." *Statistic Brain*, Statistic Brain, 25 Aug. 2016, [www.statisticbrain.com/fast-food-statistics/](http://www.statisticbrain.com/fast-food-statistics/).
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