

Letter to the editor: Healthy food bill would help kids

As a general pediatrician, I spend a lot of time discussing nutrition with my patients and their families. With the rates of obesity and other chronic diseases linked to poor nutrition continuing to cause a significant burden on people's quality of life and on our healthcare system as a whole, continued efforts are needed to help combat this ever-growing problem.



While addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, it is well known that preventing childhood obesity is one of the most effective ways to help, and one strategy in particular is to improve the quality of the food being consumed by kids in settings outside of their homes. With all of us leading busier and busier lives, families are eating out with increasing frequency; it has been estimated that kids get about 25% of their total calories from eating out.

Unfortunately, the food they get at restaurants isn't always the healthiest. On average, a child will consume twice as many calories from a meal served at a restaurant compared to a typical meal served at home, and kids' meals are often served with soda or sweetened juices, which greatly increase their risk of being overweight or obese.

With that in mind, S.70 has been introduced in the Vermont Senate and will be before the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, chaired by Senator Claire Ayer, when legislators return in January. This bill is supported by the American Heart Association and a number of state and local organizations dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of Vermonters (including Porter Medical Center and both pediatric practices here in Middlebury.) It aims to improve the nutritional quality of kids' meals by making healthy beverages, such as milk or water, the default option, insuring meals include fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins, and limiting the amount of calories, salt, sugar and fat that can be in a meal.

By creating a system to make the healthy option the easy, accessible option, our lawmakers would be taking a huge step toward improving the health of our children and, in turn, the health of our state as a whole.

With nearly a third of Vermont kids overweight or obese, it's time to act, and this is a great place to start.

Francisco Corbalan, MD, FAAP
UVMHN Porter Pediatric Primary Care

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