

The Children's Menu in Restaurants: Thurston County

A collaborative project of the Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department and Washington State University Thurston County Extension

There are many types of restaurants serving different customers using different business models and approaches to the consumer experience. The terms fast food, casual dining, bistro, steak house, family restaurant, pizzeria and fine dining are examples of the diverse array of restaurants. For the purpose of this project, restaurants were classified as being either a quick service or sit down restaurant.

A restaurant was classified as quick service if it had the following basic characteristics:

- A menu board, not menu
- The customer paid first, at a register or counter
- No tipping needed
- No waiting to be seated

A sit down restaurant was defined as using a paper menu and not having the characteristics of a quick service establishment.

A total of 290 quick service and sit down restaurants in Thurston County were visited between April-May 2008. A children's menu was present at 187 or 64% of all restaurants.

| Presence of Children's Menu at Restaurants | |
|---|--|
| Quick Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited = 129 • With Children's Menu = 90 (70%) | Sit Down <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited = 161 • With Children's Menu = 97 (60%) |

In a quick service establishment the presence of a children's menu was determined by whether a least one specific meal was listed on the menu board for kids. In a sit down restaurant, the presence of a children's meal was determined by whether a section of the menu listed at least one specific meal for kids or the presence of a separate children's menu.

| Communities | # Visited | # with Children's Menu | % with Children's Menu |
|--------------|------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Lacey | 64 | 43 | 67% |
| Olympia | 158 | 93 | 59% |
| Rainier | 2 | 2 | 100% |
| Rochester | 7 | 5 | 71% |
| Tenino | 6 | 4 | 67% |
| Tumwater | 34 | 27 | 79% |
| Yelm | 19 | 13 | 68% |
| Total | 290 | 187 | 64% |

Note: All restaurants with a children's menu were surveyed.

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Summary Findings

Data for both quick service and sit down restaurants in Thurston County showed good news and areas for improvement.

A healthier option should be available for every part of the children's meal - the beverage, the side, the entrée.

- At least 1 healthier entrée available = 52%
- At least 1 healthier side available = 61%
- At least 1 healthier beverage available = 78%

Unhealthy food and beverage options should not be assigned (on the children's menu).

- Unhealthy side assigned (default) = 39%
- Unhealthy beverage assigned (default) = 15%

Milk should be available (preferably a lowfat option).

- Milk (any kind) available = 71%
- Of restaurants with milk, 1 in 4 had lowfat milk

Children need to eat fruit and vegetables as part of every meal.

- Fruit available as a side = 37%
- Vegetables available as a side = 18%

| Examples of Fruit and Vegetable Sides | |
|--|---|
| <u>Fruit</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applesauce• Apple slices• Grapes• Melon• Mixed fruit• Oranges• Peach slices• Raisins | <u>Vegetable</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broccoli• Carrots• Celery• Green beans• Salad• Yams |

Note: Findings based on combined quick service and sit down restaurant data for both the lunch and dinner children's menu