

Burger King drops soft drinks from kids' meals

Bruce Horowitz , USA TODAY 9:59 a.m. EDT March 10, 2015

(Photo: Burger King)

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It's getting tougher for kids to get soft drinks at the fast-food joint.

Burger King has dropped fountain drinks from its kids' menu boards and they are no longer merchandised as part of Burger King Kids Meals. The stealth, unannounced move late last month by Burger King – under pressures from advocacy groups – follows similar announced moves in recent months by McDonald's and Wendy's.



Burger King made the change, "as part of our ongoing effort to offer our guests options that match lifestyle needs," said Alex Macedo, president of Burger King North America, in an e-mailed statement to USA TODAY. Instead of soft drinks, the BK menu for kids will offer fat-free milk, 100% apple juice and low-fat chocolate milk.

Soft drinks are still an option, but not listed on the Kids Meal menu.

The move comes amid a recent whirlwind of activity among major fast-food chains to improve the quality of their food in response to growing demands by consumers and activists. Last week, McDonald's announced a new policy to eliminate human antibiotics from its chicken supply over the next two years. Also last week, Dunkin' Donuts agreed to phase out a controversial whitening agent used in the powdered sugar atop some of its doughnuts.

Over time, the soft drink menu change could impact future beverage industry sales because many consumers develop their beverage consumption habits as kids. USA TODAY reached out to the American Beverage Association, but the trade group did not comment.

Leading the pressure for the change was the consumer advocacy group Center for Science in the Public Interest, which says it has lobbied Burger King for almost two years to change the menu.

"It will help children eat better now, as soda is the leading source of calories in children's diets," says Margo Wootan, director of nutrition policy for the group. "It also helps to set kids on a path toward healthier eating in the future, with fewer kids becoming conditioned to think that soda should be a part of every eating out occasion."

Sugary soft drinks are a top source of calories in children's diets and can contribute to obesity, Wootan says. The percentage of children ages 6–11 years in the U.S. who were obese increased from 7% in 1980 to nearly 18% in 2012. Similarly, the percentage of adolescents ages 12–19 years who were obese increased from 5% to nearly 21% over the same period, reports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Macedo said BK didn't immediately announce the change because it wanted to give restaurants a chance to make the change.

All of the fast-food chains are feeling increasing pressure from parents, advocacy groups and lawmakers, brand consultant Denise Lee Yohn says. "The best way to get parents to come in, is to have something that they feel OK about giving their kids."

KID'S MEAL COMPARISONS



BURGER KING

CALORIES

1% low-fat chocolate milk (8 fl. oz.) **160**

Chicken nuggets (4pc.) **190**

Apple slices **30**

Satisfries™ french fries (value, salted) **190**

Total: 570



McDONALD'S

Fat-free chocolate milk jug (8 fl. oz.) **130**

Chicken McNuggets (4 pc.) **190**

Cuties clementine orange **40**

Kids french fries **110**

Total: 470



WENDY'S

1% chocolate milk (7 oz.) **140**

Chicken nuggets (4pc.) **180**

Apple slices

40

Kid's natural-cut fries

220

Total: 580

SOURCES: Burger King, McDonald's
and Wendy's

Janet Loehrke, USA TODAY



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