Kids And Teens Eating Habits Somewhat Better Than Expected

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New Mintel survey shows health trends beginning to impact awareness

It seems â€œEat freshâ€• may ring truer to todayâ€™s kids and teens than â€œRun for the border.â€• A new survey from Minte adolescent's food perceptions and actual eating habits may not be as dire as many adults thought.

Asking why they eat what they eat, Mintel found that two in five (42%) kids and teens reach for foods that give them more energy. Over a third (35%) purposefully eat foods that are rich in vitamins and nutrients. Approximately a quarter try to eat foods that are low in fat and 22% look for low-in-sugar foods.

â€œThe battle is half won,â€• states Chris Haack, senior analyst at Mintel. â€œKids understand that food gives them energy an improves their overall health. Now, the challenge is to motivate more young people to actively improve what, when and how much they eatâ€”to place healthfulness above indulgence more frequently than not.â€•

On the positive, Mintel found two-thirds (65%) of kids and teens say they eat dinner at home at least five times a week; 33% do so daily. Haack notes that better eating often starts at home, where parents can shape food preferences and habits. According to Mintel, only 13% of youngsters sit with the family for fewer than three dinners per week. â€œThe perception that todayâ€™s youth constantly eats alone, on-the-go and out of the home is simply wrong,â€• states Haack.

Also, Mintelâ€™s research confirms that teens are especially receptive to healthy eating messages. When asked about their attitudes toward food, 66% of teens said they believed â€œeating gives you energy/vitality,â€• while 61% said â€œitâ€™s impor eat a balanced diet.â€• Two in five (41%) said they liked the trend towards healthier fast food.

Still, the number one fast food restaurant visited by youth is McDonaldâ€™s, by a large margin above better-for-you alternatives like Subway. â€œHealth and wellness campaigns have impacted kidsâ€™ and teensâ€™ food perceptions, but they havenâ€™t completely changed their eating habits,â€• comments Haack. â€œCompanies need to find ways to reinvent home-ba meals and energize healthy snacking, so todayâ€™s youth can see the benefits of better nutrition and take action.â€•

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported in May 2008 that kidsâ€™ and teensâ€™ obesity levels seem to be leveling off, having shown no significant increases from 1999 to 2006.