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Healthful food for children is the same as for adults

Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior issues position paper on the detrimental effects of diets favoring “kids’ food” on children’s preferences and tastes, published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior

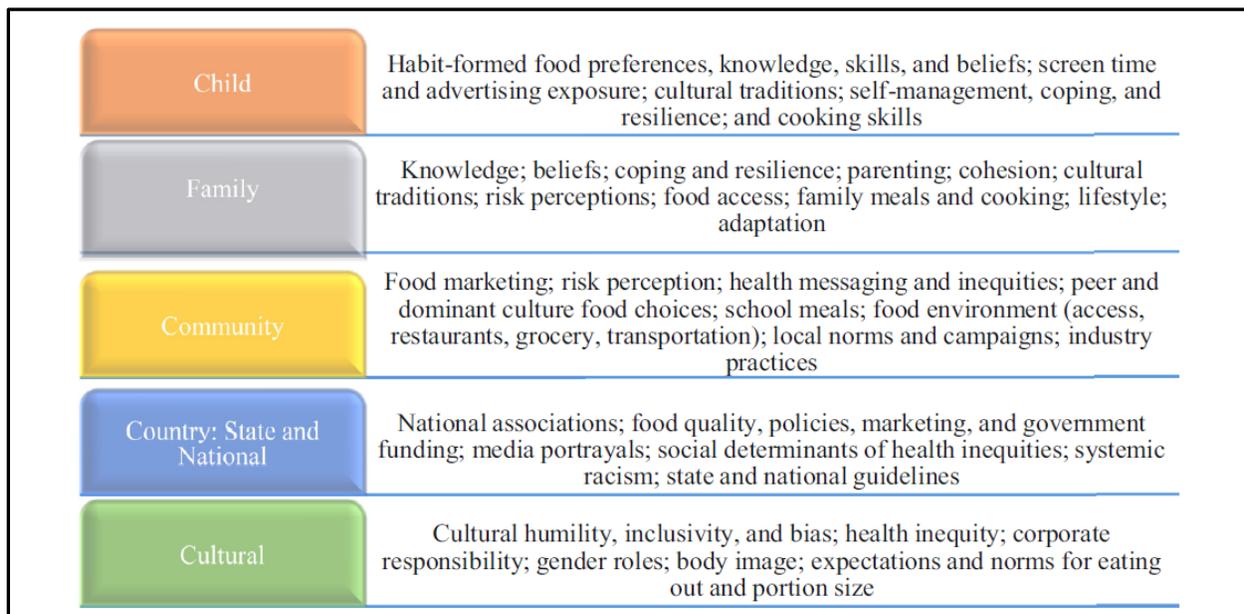
Philadelphia, January 6, 2022 – It is the position of the [Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior](#) (SNEB) that there is no difference between healthful foods for adults and for children aged 2 and older, except for age-appropriate adjustments in texture and portion size, according to a new [position paper](#) in the [Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior](#), published by Elsevier.

“If you think about kids’ food, the archetype or terminology that we widely use to describe the food that we feed our children, it’s really a social norm or societal construct that we’ve perpetuated,” says Pamela Rothpletz-Puglia, EdD, RD, School of Health Professions, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, NJ, USA.

Kids’ food is operationally defined as food likely to be consumed by children aged 2–14 years, either at home or in the community. There is a long-held belief in the United States that children need different types of foods than adults, and many of these foods are highly processed; energy-dense; and high in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar. A diet favoring these foods can have significant detrimental effects on children’s preferences and tastes, may exacerbate food neophobia or picky eating behavior sometimes seen in children, and may impact their health in the future.

In the position paper, the authors note that the idea that children need different foods than adults seems to have originated during the alcohol prohibition era when the hospitality industry created children’s menus to offset the loss of alcohol sales revenue. Since then it is known that children over 2 years of age can eat the same healthy foods as adults, but kids’ food and menus have become a social norm. This

social norm persists because ultra-processed foods like chicken tenders, hot dogs, French fries, and grilled cheese are prevalent in the food environment and they are highly palatable to children.



Caption: Framework for nutrition educators to identify modifiable focus areas to counter the kids' food archetype (Credit: *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*).

Nutrition educators play key roles in shifting consumer demand and social norms about food choices. They can do this by creating family and community resilience and healthy adaptation to the ultra-processed food environment, and by promoting the knowledge that children over the age of 2 can eat the same healthy foods as adults eat (while accounting for age-appropriate and nutrition requirements). They can also help improve the unhealthy aspects of the kids' food archetype by working with the media, restaurant industry, and policy makers on health promotion messaging, marketing, menu labeling, and healthy default menu options. By shifting norms about kids' food toward healthy food that both adults and children can enjoy, nutrition educators can promote healthy social and behavior changes at the individual, family, community, and societal levels.

"I think we need to partner with communities, the food industry, and policy makers," says Rothpletz-Puglia. "We need to partner and create mutually beneficial solutions."

Notes for editors

The article is "Position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior: Healthful Food for Children is the Same as Adults," by Pamela Rothpletz-Puglia, EdD, RD; Lynn Fredericks, BA; Margaret Rush Dreker, MPA, MLS; Rachael Patusco, DCN, RDN, CSP; and Jane Ziegler, DCN, RDN, LDN (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2021.09.007>). It appears in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, volume 54, issue 1 (January 2022), published by [Elsevier](#).

The article is openly available at [https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046\(21\)00814-9/fulltext](https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(21)00814-9/fulltext).

Full text of the article is also available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Eileen Leahy at +1 732 238 3628 or jnebmmedia@elsevier.com to obtain a copy. To schedule an interview with the author(s), please contact Pamela Rothpletz-Puglia, EdD, RD, at pr.puglia@shp.rutgers.edu.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Pamela Rothpletz-Puglia, EdD, RD, and other information for journalists are available at www.jneb.org/content/media. Excerpts from the podcast may be reproduced by the media with permission from Eileen Leahy.

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The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (JNEB), the official journal of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB), is a refereed, scientific periodical that serves as a resource for all professionals with an interest in nutrition education and dietary/physical activity behaviors. The purpose of JNEB is to document and disseminate original research, emerging issues, and practices relevant to nutrition education and behavior worldwide and to promote healthy, sustainable food choices. It supports the society's efforts to disseminate innovative nutrition education strategies, and communicate information on food, nutrition, and health issues to students, professionals, policymakers, targeted audiences, and the public.

The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* features articles that provide new insights and useful findings related to nutrition education research, practice, and policy. The content areas of JNEB reflect the diverse interests of health, nutrition, education, Cooperative Extension, and other professionals working in areas related to nutrition education and behavior. As the Society's official journal, JNEB also includes occasional policy statements, issue perspectives, and member communications. www.jneb.org

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