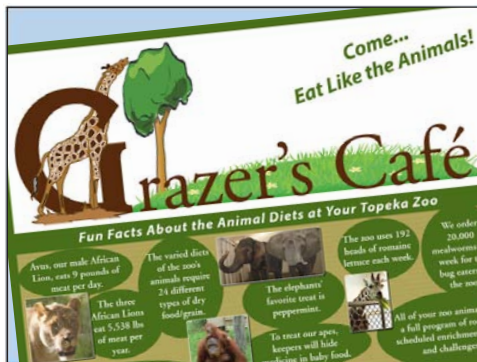


SODIUM REDUCTION | Kansas Eating As Well As the Animals

December 2013



Problem

Most of the sodium that Americans consume each day comes from processed foods. The concession stand at the Topeka Zoo offered mostly processed, higher-sodium snacks and meals to visitors.

Project

With support from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Shawnee County Health Agency, Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods, and Kansas Health Foundation, the zoo launched a complete review of its concession stand's menu, with a focus on reducing sodium.

Outcomes

Following review and approval of the new menu by a dietitian, visitors are now enjoying more healthful menu options at the zoo's snack bar. For example, the sodium content of the three most popular sandwiches was reduced by an average of 45% per sandwich.

Resources

- Kansas Department of Health and Environment
www.kdheks.gov/health
- Kansas Health Foundation
www.kansashealth.org
- Shawnee County Health Agency
www.shawneehealth.org

**For more information please contact
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333

Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov

“Veggie sticks with hummus seem to be the biggest hit. Moms with kids seem happy that they have healthier options instead of just fries.”

—Brendan Wiley, Executive Director, Topeka Zoo

Statement of Problem: Reducing sodium intake can help lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, but about 90% of Americans eat too much sodium every day. In 2011, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and the Shawnee County Health Agency conducted a survey on sodium intake among county adults. The findings showed an estimated average daily intake of 3,500 milligrams (mg) of sodium among respondents, far above the recommended limit of 2,300 mg per day. Most of this sodium comes from processed and restaurant foods. Staff at the Topeka Zoo in Shawnee County, Kansas, questioned why the zoo's concession stand seemed to offer mostly unhealthy, higher sodium items for staff and visitors. The staff made well-balanced, natural diets a priority for the animals, but the menu available to the zoo's 23 staff members and more than 200,000 annual visitors included mostly higher sodium, unhealthful items. These offerings did not fit with the zoo's overarching philosophy of providing a healthful environment for animals and people.

Project Description: As a grantee of CDC's Sodium Reduction in Communities Program, KDHE provided support to the Topeka Zoo for developing and marketing a refreshed menu with healthier offerings. The Kansas Health Foundation also provided a grant for equipment to Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods, a local nonprofit coalition. With this support, zoo staff began working with a registered dietitian to review the concession stand menu, provide creative ideas for new offerings, and taste test proposed items. Staff decided to replace many items and found more healthful ways to prepare others. For example, staff increased vegetable options and reduced the sodium content in three of the most popular sandwiches by an average 45% (440 mg) per sandwich. Staff aligned the new menu offerings with the zoo animals' diets and promoted the menu with the slogan, “Eat What the Animals Eat!”

Outcomes: Zoo visitors began sampling the new Grazer's Café menu with significantly less sodium in March 2013. In place of options like hot dogs and chicken nuggets, visitors can choose the “Hippo Meal” veggie wrap or “Kid's Hippo Meal” veggie plate. The “Giraffe Meal” is a fruit and nut salad with side options such as vegetable sticks with hummus. So far, responses from zoo visitors have been positive. A summer 2013 intercept survey of 108 visitors found that 78% viewed the menu changes as favorable.

Conclusions: This project illustrates a successful collaboration. Zoo staff wanted to see changes because they believed in the zoo's mission and recognized the contradiction between that mission and the need for more nutritious food. As a result, zoo staff members are proud of the new menu and their part in its development. As a next step, the Topeka Zoo is working with the Topeka City Council and Friends of the Zoo to maintain and expand the movement toward healthier food options.