

What Are You Really Paying For?

Purpose:

Youth will learn about the different strategies food companies use to get them to purchase products.

Youth will be able to assess how much money they spend on convenience food.

Youth will be able to describe ways to reduce their convenience food purchases.

Session One

Before you begin:

1. Review *How Much Do You Spend on Food Each Week?* handout.

What to do:

1. As a group, discuss some of the things that influence snacking habits.
What is the first thing you think about when you want a snack?
What is most important to you when choosing snack foods? (e.g., cravings, taste, cost, convenience, availability, peer pressure, family, advertising, nutrition).
2. Name a popular food or drink slogan and see if the youth recognize the product associated with it. (You can use the following examples or come up with your own.)

<u>Slogan</u>	<u>Brand</u>
Do the Dew	Mountain Dew
We love to see you smile.	McDonald's
Got a minute?	Snickers
Up Yours	7up
Obey Your Thirst	Sprite
Don't Boink	PowerBar

3. Ask the youth how much of an impact food advertisements have on them.
4. Ask youth to give examples of the strategies food companies use to get people to buy their product. Some strategies include:

Ad Campaigns/Merchandising - These feature popular music, funny slogans, bright colors and celebrities. Advertising techniques lead you to think you can be like the person in the ad and suggest that everyone is eating/drinking their product.

Packaging - Attractive, bright colors.

Location - Vending machines in schools, fast food places near schools, cafeteria contracts with fast food restaurants.

Gimmicks - Premiums, sweepstakes, clubs.

Claims - Misleading statements about what their product can do for you.

How do these strategies affect them? Which ones affect their purchases the most?

5. Ask youth to guess what they think the average youth spends on convenience food purchases each week. Explain that they can see how much they spend on snacks in one week by keeping a record of their snack purchases and how much they cost. Pass out *How Much Do You Spend on Food Each Week?* handout and explain how to complete it.
6. Tell youth to bring completed handouts to the next session.

Option: Establish a points scale. Youth who turn in completed handouts earn points.

Session Two

Before you begin:

1. Make copies and review *What Are You Really Paying For?* handout.
2. Remind youth to bring in their completed handouts.

What to do:

1. Have youth tell a partner or a small group what they spent on food in one week. Calculate the total and average the amount the entire group spent.
2. Discuss the following questions:
 - ◆ What influenced your purchases (ad campaigns, merchandising, taste, price, convenience, peers)?
 - ◆ On average, what types of food did you buy? Was the food high-fat, high sugar, or was it nutritious?
 - ◆ When do you purchase your food (before school, during, after)?
 - ◆ Where do you purchase most of your food (vending machines, fast food restaurants, liquor stores)?
3. Ask youth if they feel their food purchases were worth the amount of money they spent.
 - ◆ Are you getting the best value for your money in terms of value, quality and nutrition?
 - ◆ Are the foods you are eating meeting your nutritional needs?
 - ◆ Who really benefits from your purchases – the company or you?
4. Pass out copies of *What Are You Really Paying For?* Ask youth if they feel they get their money's worth. Discuss what they think the consumer pays for when they purchase convenience type food products (advertising campaigns, packaging, merchandising, location, gimmicks, taste, quality, nutrition, convenience). Explain that all of the strategies that they learned about last session are added into the cost of the products.
5. Review the sections "Who Pays The Price?" and "Are You Getting the Most for Your \$?".
6. Ask youth how they would benefit by buying fewer convenience food items.

How much money could you save each week, month, year if you spent less on convenience food?

What would you do with the money you saved? (Refer to “What You Could Be Saving” on the *What Are You Really Paying For?* handouts.)

Do you think your health would benefit? If so, how?

7. Have youth discuss what types of things they can make to save money on their food purchases. (Refer to “What You Could Be Saving” on *What Are You Really Paying For?* handouts.)

Additional Discussion Topics

1. Ask youth if they feel it is fair for food and soda companies to advertise unhealthy foods to young people. Should the companies take responsibility for the health problems experienced by people who consume a lot of their unhealthy foods? (diabetes, heart disease) Is this different from tobacco companies taking responsibilities for lung cancer deaths? Why or why not?

2. Is it fair for convenience food companies to advertise in schools (such as on scoreboards, in buses, in the curriculum).

Extension Activity

Have youth watch their favorite television shows and count how many times they see advertisements for fast food and/or snack foods (including soda).

What Are You Really Paying For?

When you eat at the local fast food joint or buy chips, candy or soda from the corner convenience store, do you ever stop to think about what you are really paying for?

Did you know?

Food companies spend billions of dollars each year in advertising, marketing, and promotional costs that target young people. Each year Coke and Diet Coke spend about \$154 million; M&M candies spends about \$67 million, Lay's potato chips spends about \$56 million; and Kool-Aid beverages spends about \$19 million in advertising costs. (*100 leading national advertiser. Advertising Age 1999 Sept 27;S1-S46.*) The fact that their ads have popular music, flashy special effects, catchy slogans and celebrities is no coincidence. Food companies do research on what types of images will attract young people and convince you to buy their products. After all, young people have money to spend!

Ways food companies get you to buy their products:

- ◆ They use flashy packaging
- ◆ Their products are sold where you are: at the mall, near or in your schools.
- ◆ They offer cool prizes and gifts.
- ◆ They lead you to think you can be like the people in their ads.
- ◆ They suggest that everyone is eating or drinking their products.
- ◆ They appeal to your senses by using pictures or sound.

TEEN SPENDING...

- Experts estimate that the average youth spends over \$2000 each year on food. *Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1995.*

Who Pays The Price?

When you buy a burger at the mall or around the corner from your school you aren't just paying for the beef, bun and special sauce. You also pay for part of the high rent fast food places pay to be in a prime location where you hang out. And you're paying for the flashy ad that you see on TV that features your favorite basketball star enjoying a burger. It's not cheap for companies to buy commercial time during peak hours when young people watch TV the most, and we all know that star athletes do not work for free.

What You Pay When You Eat Out	What You Pay If You Make It Yourself
\$2.29 for a bugger with cheese \$1.65 for a large fries	\$1.06 for hamburger and ingredients \$.48 for store brand frozen fries
\$3.94	\$1.54

That's a difference of \$2.40!

Are you getting the most for your \$?

Not only are fast foods and snack foods expensive and overpriced, but they are loaded with fat, sugar, salt, dyes, preservatives, artificial flavors and other additives. Eating a lot of these types of foods is unhealthy and can put you at risk for developing diseases like diabetes and heart disease. **Yes, YOU!**

You decide -

Planning and making your own meals and snacks can save you money and improve your nutrition. But even if you eat on the run, there are cheaper and healthier foods to buy.

POOR CHOICES			BETTER CHOICES		
Food	Calories	Fat	Food	Calories Saved	Fat Saved
<i>Fruit Pie</i>	470	22 g	<i>Bagel</i>	195	21 g
<i>Chocolate Candy Bar</i>	292	15	<i>Rice and Marshmallow Bar</i>	192	13 g
<i>Small Bag Potato Chips</i>	152	10 g	<i>Pretzels</i>	42	9 g

What you could be saving -

Do you ever think about how much money you could save if you didn't eat so much junk food?

What You Spend	Money You Could Save In A Year	What You Could Buy With The Money You Save
If you purchase a 59¢ candy bar on the way home from school every day...	\$144	17 regular priced movie tickets 26 matinee-priced movie tickets
If you purchased a \$1.00 soda every day at school...	\$375	26 CD's (at \$14/CD) 37 Tapes (at \$10/tape)
If you purchased a \$3.59 burger and fries meal 3 times a week...	\$517	7 new pairs of athletic shoes (average cost of an athletic shoe estimated at \$75)

How Much Do You Spend on Food Each Week?

Keep track of the food you buy. Make sure to list the type of food (including brand name), how much it costs, where you purchased it and when you bought it. Use the following key: BS = Before school DS = During school AS = After school

Foods Purchased	Cost	Where	When
Example: Soda	\$1.00	Vending Machine	AS
Day 1 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
Day 2 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
Day 3 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
Day 4 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		

Day 5 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
Day 6 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
Day 7 _____			
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
	\$		
Total \$ Spent:			

Answer the following questions about your food purchases.

1. What influenced your food purchases? (Taste, price, convenience, commercials, ads, peers)

2. Where did you spend most of your money?

3. When did you make most of your purchases? (Before school, during school, after school)

4. How would you describe the food you bought the most? (Check one)

Good for you _____ High fat _____ High sugar _____