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News Release

Food Pushers

Educating children and teens on the dangers of drug pushers is common. However, it may be time to launch a new health and safety campaign concerning the dangers of food pushers. Most of the food- pushing villains are trusted adults in the youth's lives. Although they may seem harmless at first, they are developing habit forming behavior that can have just as deadly an effect as drugs. Overeating eventually leads to obesity and contributes to diabetes, heart problems and some cancers.

The pushers begin with discreet tactics for example, "You can't have the fun meal toy until all of the food is eaten." Then, they build into guilt trips like, "I can't believe that you won't even try this dish. It is an old family recipe." Eating all of the French fries in the fun meal is not the most desirable training. Instead teaching children to eat only half of the fries would be a step in the right direction. Showing disappointment when someone does not eat the food that has been prepared not only makes the other person feel badly but it forces them to eat food that they do not want.

As children grow older, food pushers slip in food as a system of punishment and reward. Statements like, "You can't have dessert because you misbehaved" or "If you behave, I'll buy you a pizza" send the wrong messages. Food begins to be associated with self worth. Food pushers also develop the concept that food provides comfort. When a child is upset or sick, the pushers produce the child's favorite food as a way to ease the pain. These adults also instill food habits as associated with joy. Cakes, ice cream, chips and colas are served as a means of celebrating.

Even diet conscious adults can fall prey to the food pushers. When food is politely declined, insults follow: "No wonder you're so skinny. You won't eat anything."

"I don't like people who will not try new foods."

"Just a few bites won't hurt."

"You've simply got to taste this. It's my new recipe."

How should we combat the food pushers? The same way we teach children to avoid drug pushers. When approached by a person trying to force food upon us, we should give the bug-eyed look of fright, scream "No, leave me alone" and run. It works pretty well in most instances, but be prepared if your mother is the pusher, she can usually out run you.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Jennifer Dutton at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email jld0021@aces.edu.

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