
Eat at McDonald's – Work out All Day

Ronald Deceiving Kids in Classrooms

January 28, 2005

John F. Banzhaf III

<<<>>>

Under a new scheme, Ronald McDonald is being dubbed a "Chief Happiness Officer," and will be sent into schools as a "Health Ambassador " to teach children that an active lifestyle, rather than cutting down on overeating and fattening foods, is the key to avoid being overweight.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43011-2005Jan27.html?sub=AR>

But children who exercise every day will not begin to burn off the calories they consume with a typical McDonald's meal, says public interest lawyer John Banzhaf, noting that their meals intended for pre-teen children contain dangerous amounts of calories and fats. Indeed, as the London Times reported [11/30/03]: "In America, Mighty Kids Meals have 800 calories and more than half the amount of saturated fat that an adult should have in a day."

McDonald's Mighty Kids Meals are aimed at children 7-8 years of age. To burn the 800 calories in such a meal, a typical 7-year old girl would have to:

- * walk for 9.3 hours OR
- * play volleyball for 8.1 hours OR
- * play baseball for 6.6 hours OR
- * swim or play paddleball for 5.4 hours OR
- * engage in aerobics for 5 hours

Since children above 10 years of age are likely to regard Ronald as babyish, let's see what a 10-year old boy, eating a more typical adult meal [Big Mac, large fries, McFlurry drink] would have to do to burn off the 1790 calories in such a meal (which also contains 83 grams of fat):

- * walk for 15 hours OR
- * play volleyball for 13 hours OR
- * play baseball for 10.5 hours OR
- * swim or play paddleball for 8.8 hours OR
- * engage in aerobics for 8 hours

"While regular exercise obviously can play a role in maintaining a healthy weight for both children and adults, these figures make it abundantly clear that exercising cannot possibly compensate for eating fattening meals of the kind that McDonald's spend billions of dollars to promote. Telling kids that they can remain slim simply by engaging in regular exercise, and not passing up the Golden Arches, is deceptive, and teachers and schools should not cooperate," says Banzhaf.

The calculations above are all based upon information from independent sources, and those who are curious can make their own calculations for children of different ages and different activities by going directly to these sources:

Calories burned per hour from various activities:

http://caloriesperhour.com/index_burn.html

Average height and weight for children of different ages:

http://www.babybag.com/articles/htwt_av.htm

Calories in McDonald's and other fast food meals:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/flash/health/caloriecounter/counter.htm>.

SEE ALSO RELATED PRESS RELEASE BELOW

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Friday 1/28/05

Ronald McDonald a Subversive "Health Ambassador" in Schools Program Could Rebound and Increase Legal Liability

"Sending Ronald McDonald into schools to serve as a 'Health Ambassador' teaching children about fitness is as subversive as using Joe Camel to teach kids about proper breathing techniques to help counteract the effects of smoking," say public interest law professor John Banzhaf.

Moreover, the new program could rebound and increase the company's potential legal liability by serving as an example of their cynical disregard about responsibility for promoting obesity among children, says the lawyer who helped mastermind the first successful fat law against McDonald's, and who has served as an advisor on the law suit against McDonald's for contributing to the obesity of minors which was just unanimously reinstated by the nation's second highest court.

Under its new scheme, Ronald is being dubbed "Chief Happiness Officer" at McDonald's, and will be sent into schools as a "Health Ambassador " to teach children that an active lifestyle, rather than cutting down on overeating and fattening foods, is the key to avoid being overweight.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43011-2005Jan27.html?sub=AR>

But children who get the recommended amount of exercise every day will not begin to burn off the calories they consume with a typical McDonald's meal, says Banzhaf, noting that their meals intended for pre-teen children contain dangerous amounts of calories and fats. Indeed, as the London Times reported [11/30/03]:

"In America, Mighty Kids Meals have 800 calories and more than half the amount of saturated fat that an adult should have in a day. Of course they should carry a health warning. Instead, they carry toys in a blatant attempt to exploit pester power in restaurants."

Independent attorneys, and even those who oppose obesity litigation, are taking the reinstatement of the McDonald's law suit very seriously. For example:
<http://washingtontimes.com/business/20050126-094210-4294r.htm>

* Lawyer Joseph McMEnamin, who has defended companies in class-action asbestos lawsuits, advised fast-food restaurants to monitor the case carefully. The bar that is pushing the obesity lawsuits "is filled with able people, well-funded and organized. It would be a mistake to underestimate its creativity and capabilities," said Mr. McMEnamin, a partner at the Richmond office of the national law firm McGuireWoods LLP.

* "When this first came out, we teased [that] restaurants would have to put warning labels on their hamburgers. This opinion seems to be headed in that direction," said Reid Cox, general counsel for the Center for Individual Freedom, a free-market-oriented advocacy group in Alexandria. He also said he was worried the appeals court decision would extend beyond the fast-food industry and affect advertising for businesses operating in New York.

Banzhaf says that rather than trying to deflect blame for the current epidemic of pediatric obesity onto children who may not get enough exercise, McDonald's should acknowledge its own role, especially since an independent economic study suggests that fast food restaurants cause over 60% of the current obesity epidemic:
<http://www.nber.org/digest/feb03/w9247.html>

"Rather than badgering fat kids to get more exercise, McDonald's should post the calorie count of its products on menu boards (as some chains are doing) so that parents and older children can make intelligent eating choices, and provide warnings or health advisories about eating too many fattening foods (as McDonald's in France and PepsiCo in the US are already doing)."

PROFESSOR JOHN F. BANZHAF III
Professor of Public Interest Law
Dr. William Cahan Distinguished Professor
George Washington University Law School
2000 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006, USA
(202) 994-7229 // (202) 659-4312 // (703) 527-8418
<http://banzhaf.net> <http://banzhaf.net/obesitylinks>