

Testing the appeal of healthy homemade takeaway-style meals

Background

In late-2010 the Health Sponsorship Council (HSC) undertook some testing of six healthy, low-cost, homemade takeaway-style meals to assess their appeal.

Overseas research shows that takeaway foods are generally less healthy than home-prepared meals, meaning there is a benefit in developing healthier homemade alternatives to takeaways. To find out more about what New Zealanders like, the HSC tested the meals with 10 low income households (four Mā ori, four Pacific, and two European). Parents were given the recipe and ingredients to cook one of the meals and post-meal feedback was obtained from all household members who ate the meal.

Key Findings

Influences on meal choices

"I tend to look at what the whole family likes, the kids and my husband, and factor the budget in."

- The parents tended to use a set repertoire of meals and a standard grocery shopping list.
- The main household grocery shopping was done once a week on or straight after payday (typically a Wednesday or Thursday), usually at a supermarket, with top-up shopping done at smaller retailers (eg, dairies).
- Takeaways tended to be bought in the days leading up to the next main shop as that was when household food supplies were running out.
- The primary factors influencing meal decisions were time, money, and organisation (eg, remembering to take meat out of the freezer).

- Secondary factors were taste, making sure the meal was filling, and that the food was available in the house.
- The parents preferred to make healthy meals, and generally knew what was healthy and unhealthy (eg, "frying food is unhealthy"), but nutrition was their lowest priority compared with time, cost, taste, etc.
- The parents were keen to try new meals, but were concerned that if their family didn't like them they would have wasted time, money, and food.

Attitudes to takeaways

"... I can use that [leftover money after the main shop] for takeaways later in the week when I get home and I'm tired and do not want to cook. It's a treat for me and the kids. Everyone is happy."

- Takeaways were purchased as a supplement to a meal (eg, hot chips or fried rice bought as a side dish) due to the cost of buying a whole takeaway meal.
- Bought takeaways were generally considered to be just as healthy as home-cooked foods (eg, "fried rice has vegetables").
- Parents liked bought takeaways because they knew their children would eat them and there are fewer dishes to do at the end of the meal (compared with a home-cooked meal).
- The parents reported that if they had more money they would buy whole takeaway meals or buy more expensive takeaway meals.

Trialling the homemade takeaway-style meals

"It was so fresh, tasty, and more healthy. I like takeaways, but this meal [Easy Cheesy Burgers] was a much better version of the one you can buy at a takeaway."

Testing the appeal of healthy homemade takeaway-style meals (continued)

- The parents enjoyed the process of choosing the homemade takeaway-style meal to cook.
- Reasons for rejecting meals included perceived cost of the meal, the total preparation time, and the perception that the portion sizes were too small (based on the photo accompanying the recipe).
- The burger meal was selected most often as it was perceived as the most substantial meal and could be customised to suit each individual's taste.
- Neither the pizza nor sweet and sour meals were selected, in part because the portions appear too small in the photos (eg, the sweet and sour pork photo did not show the rice).
- The parents were surprised at how filling the meals were, especially if they had perceived the portions as being small.
- Feedback from the household members after the meal was very positive with almost all people preferring the homemade takeaway-style meal to bought takeaways.

Conclusions

- To appeal to parents, new meal ideas should use similar ingredients and be of a similar preparation time and cost as the meals they currently make.
- To maximise appeal, the photo of the meal accompanying the recipe needs to match the final product, especially regarding portion size.
- Providing people the opportunity to try the meals (eg, in-store tastings or cooking classes) may also increase the uptake of meals.



Easy Cheesy Burger



Pizza



Sweet and Sour Pork

Note: These findings cannot be generalised due to the research method used. However, the findings do provide useful insights and some findings are supported by larger scale research.

About the HSC

The HSC is a crown entity that uses health promotion initiatives to promote health and encourage healthy lifestyles, with a long-term focus on reducing the social, financial and health costs of a number of health behaviours.

Citation

Murray, S.J. (2011). *Testing the appeal of healthy homemade takeaway-style meals* [In Fact]. Wellington: Health Sponsorship Council