

CICN: How to Reduce Sugar at Breakfast

The webinar I chose for my second choice was a topic that I have been deeply interested in for many years and I find it very interesting on what changes have been made and are to come. This webinar trying to focus on strategies to reduce added sugars in school breakfast menus while also trying to maintain the flavor, nutrition, and the overall likelihood that the student would eat it. I think while conceptualizing these topics we must hold a practical approach while considering the districts, the cooking processes, natural and unnatural sweeteners, and “whole” foods but all while still trying to maintain USDA compliance. Some of the key topics they discuss were the limits of added sugar and the standards, the health benefits of reducing adding sugars, their strategies to address this problem, and the implementation of new strategies.

The first topic was about added sugars and the USDA and school standards. The standard as of now for the basic’s food choices are that breakfast cereals should have no more than 6 grams per dry ounce, yogurt have no more than 12 grams per 6 ounces and that flavored milk have more more than 10 grams per 8 fluid ounces. While these are concerns, in the past few years’ protein has been all hype and a lot of people are talking about the protein first approach. While in schools they are allowing schools to offer meat alternatives or grains or both in combination to meet the standards. I think while most people think of school foods, they may think of lunch, but many students also rely on breakfast at schools for their nutrients for the day and by providing them a well-balanced meal to start the day should be a priority. Along with this discussion, many studies have shown that if someone was to consume a high protein meal to start their day, it may reduce overall hunger throughout the day, increase fullness and have more energy throughout the day compared to carb heavy, low protein meals for breakfast. While we do

not scapegoat any food, I think reducing the added sugar consumption to their daily/ weekly limits could only show positive results. I think that while the recommendation is no more than 10% added sugar compared to the overall intake, I think if I looked back at what I ate for breakfast in school, this would be well over this, and I still had 3-4 meals left in that day. I think starting a student's day off right with protein that they may not have access to at home is essential and it would also help them hit their protein requirements for that day without putting extra financial stress on the family for food.

They mention some public-school strategies to this problem and while it may not be as simple as what is on paper, I think having an approach is a great start. Minneapolis public schools have implemented a two-week A/B cycle menu with also removing high sugar items and I think this is great, but I think having pilot studies to see what foods might do better than others is worth the money. They also removed the 5 highest sugar cereals and replaced them with lower sugar and higher protein alternatives. I wanted to mention, because I have been aware of the low carb and high protein movement in foods for a while, but a lot of the cereals introduce net zero carb cereals. While they still have plenty of sugar and carbohydrates they are offset by fiber. These are easy tools to introduce but I think for me at least, I would want to consume the whole food options like fruit and meat rather than the high fiber cereals that could cause minor symptoms in some children as well. They took another approach as well, by introducing enjoyable hot and cold entrees that are high in protein like breakfast burritos and alike which still are not whole foods, but the processing of foods has its benefits just like whole foods and all these foods have a place in our diet. I think the main concern that may arise in this switch is the cost of the alternative foods. While it may be a little more costly, buying in bulk from local farmers or retailers could have a net positive effect for everyone. While the student is getting

higher protein less added sugar meals, the local economy is getting stimulated and growing their business to possibly branch out of their area and help other school districts.

On the other hand, other public schools have implemented the elimination of flavored milk and focus on scratch cooking. Many of these changes, I would also try to implement but on a case-by-case basis. I say this because of the calories and while people trying to obtain a calorie deficit, I usually recommend not to drink your calories but those searching for a calorie surplus, I recommend this approach because at least for me, I find it very hard to consume those last 200-500 calories. They also tried to replace high sugar foods with lower sugar alternatives which come of the items on the menu were difficult to replace. While changing the menus are a great idea and removing added sugars from student diets may be great too, I think the important factor here is education. I have done this with my family in the past, and just removing the foods may not be the answer but doing this along with educating why we are removing them is very helpful and can transfer to the household as well. They then go on the talk about replacing refined sugar with honey and maple syrup and this may not be as cut and dry. For instance, if they are trying to achieve the calorie aspect, artificial sweeteners may be the choice but if they choose the first route, they just must be mindful of the calories that come with honey and syrup as well. However, with all the headlines about these items, many parents who may not be on board with this choice because of the fear of the microbiota or cancer risk. Which, as of now, there is not research on this topic to convince me about moderate consumption of these items and the risk mentioned above compared to the benefits if replacing sugary options.

With any change there will be challenges and solutions but for this topic, I think it comes with its fair share. The first challenge being cost and staff, family and student resistance. They

came up with some solutions for these problems, they were to sample new recipes, train the staff and using educational videos for all three. The next challenge, which I think might be the most difficult, is student acceptance. If you make a change but no one adopts the change, it is worse than when you first started. I think having items that are well known and enjoyed but also better alternatives would be well received but I would recommend pilot testing to save money and not implement the change to an entire district. I think if the students come first, the new menu changes would work. As I say with patient first care, this is just like that, and working with the students and their families could help formulate new menus that are “healthy”, meet the guidelines and are also loved by the students. This problem is not a quick fix and may take years to adopt but I think having small pilot studies like the ones they mentioned is a great start and hopefully it can be implemented throughout the entire country and my hope is that these changes are well funded and not only do the students get the benefits, but local farmers and retailers also see the change. I like to think of diet change in family like a pyramid, and everything you teach the parents trickles down to the children. If we want change, we have to educate and fund these programs, and only then will the health and financial stress be reduced and families can adopt these changes with ease.