

Happy and Healthy?

McDonald's is making changes to its kids' meals.

Customers at McDonald's may soon notice that there is something missing from the Happy Meal menu: cheeseburgers.

McDonald's recently announced plans to make its kids' meals more nutritious. By June, all Happy Meals sold in the U.S. will have no more than 600 calories (see "Calorie Count"). They will also have less salt, sugar, and fat.

To reach these goals, the nation's largest fast-food chain will add bottled water to the Happy Meal menu. It will also reduce the amount of sugar in its chocolate milk. Cheeseburgers, which have more calories than plain burgers, will be included in Happy Meals only by request.

This isn't the first time the

company has given its Happy Meals a makeover. For example, in 2011, apple slices became a standard side. And in 2013, McDonald's stopped offering soda as one of its main drink options with kids' meals.

"We want to give our customers food that parents are happy about and that kids will eat," says Becca Hary, a spokesperson for McDonald's.

Fast-Food Nation

McDonald's decided to **modify** its menu at a time of growing concern about what American children eat. About 20 percent of kids in the U.S. are obese, or very overweight, according to the U.S. Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Experts say fast food has a lot to do with that. The CDC reports that on any given day, one-third of all kids in the U.S. eat fast food. Research shows that kids take in 126 more calories on days they eat fast food.

Jennifer Harris is a professor at the University of Connecticut who studies kids' nutrition. Like many experts, she says the menu changes are a step in the right direction. But she points out that McDonald's will still have less-nutritious foods.

"Once a child smells french fries and sees soda, it's very difficult for them to make the healthier choice," says Harris.



Word to Know

modify verb. to make changes to something

Calorie Count

Calories are the fuel your body needs to keep going. But consuming more calories than you need can lead to weight gain. Here's a look at how long it takes to burn off the calories in some Happy Meal items.

Recommended Daily Calorie Intake for Kids 9 to 13
Boys: 1,800-2,200
Girls: 1,600-2,000

	Apple Slices = 	Jumping rope for 3 minutes
	Fat-Free Chocolate Milk = 	Walking for 1 hour and 7 minutes

	Kids' Fries = 	Swimming for 28 minutes
	Hamburger = 	Riding a bike for 1 hour and 42 minutes

Soaring to the Sun

A new spacecraft will study the sun up close for the first time.



This illustration shows the Parker Solar Probe, which is about the size of a small car.

Our lives revolve around the sun. Without its light and heat, nothing on Earth could survive. But scientists still have a lot to learn about the massive, fiery star at the center of our solar system.

NASA is hoping its Parker Solar Probe will help solve some of the mysteries of the sun. The U.S. space agency will launch the probe on an **unprecedented** mission this summer.

"Observing a star up close is something no one has ever done before," says Thomas Zurbuchen, a scientist at NASA.

One goal of the mission is to

study solar storms. These are violent explosions on the sun's surface that send particles of energy streaming through the solar system. Solar storms can cause trouble on Earth. They can interfere with signals sent to Earth by communications satellites. They may also disrupt the power grids that send electricity to our homes. That could cause blackouts. Scientists want to learn how to better predict these storms so they can protect our technology.

NASA will also use the probe to study the heat around the sun. Temperatures usually drop

as you move farther away from a source of heat. But strangely, parts of the sun's atmosphere are much hotter than its surface. To find out why, the probe will become the first spacecraft ever to plunge into the sun's atmosphere. It has a high-tech heat shield that can withstand temperatures of up to 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit.

This will enable the probe to come within nearly 4 million miles of the sun. That might seem like a huge distance, but it's closer than any spacecraft has come before.

The probe will orbit the sun 24 times during its seven-year mission. Traveling at nearly 450,000 miles per hour, it will make its closest loop in 2024.

NASA is inviting people from around the world to take part in the mission. Names submitted online by April 27 will be loaded onto a memory card that will fly aboard the probe. NASA is calling it "the hottest ticket this summer."

Fun Sun Facts

The sun isn't solid. It's made up mostly of the gases **hydrogen and helium**.

The sun is more than **4.5 billion** years old.

If the sun were the size of a basketball, Earth would be the size of a pinhead.

More than a million Earths could fit inside the sun.

The temperature in the center of the sun is about **27 million degrees**.

It takes light from the sun an average of **8 minutes and 20 seconds** to reach Earth.



Word to Know

unprecedented adjective. never done before

Coyotes Come to Town



Over the past hundred years, coyotes have ranged farther across North America.

Some people in Venice, Florida, were surprised when they met their new neighbors this summer. A family of coyotes had moved into the backyard of an empty house on their street.

A hundred years ago, you wouldn't have seen a coyote in Florida. For centuries, coyotes lived mainly in the grasslands of what is now the western United States. But now it's not unusual to spot a coyote just about anywhere in the U.S. That includes big cities such as Chicago, Illinois, and New York

City. Since 1950, coyotes have expanded their range more than any other meat-eating animal in North America.

On the Move

Why have coyotes spread into so many areas? Scientists say the main reason is the disappearance of their natural **predators**, especially wolves. Wolves have been wiped out in some areas after decades of being hunted. With no wolves to attack them, coyotes were able to move in.

At the same time, humans have built cities and towns on what used to be open land. Coyotes are good at adjusting to these changes. They have learned to live under houses, on beaches, and in drainpipes.

Coyotes are now so common that experts say we must learn to live safely together with them. Wildlife rescue expert Pam DeFouw says the animals aren't usually on the hunt for humans.

"They are as afraid of us as we are of them," says DeFouw.

Coyotes' Range



Plus, coyotes do an important job. They help get rid of pests by eating rats, mice, and insects.

But coyotes sometimes prey on pets. DeFouw tells pet owners to keep cats indoors and walk dogs on a leash. People should not feed coyotes or leave food outside. And if you see a coyote, make noise to scare it away. If it seems sick, call wildlife officials.

"Coyotes are here to stay," says DeFouw. "Be cautious, but don't live in fear of them."

Though coyotes usually try to avoid humans, they can attack pets.



WORD TO KNOW

predators noun, plural. animals that survive mostly by killing and eating other animals



The AMAZON



AS YOU READ

The Amazon rainforest has been in the news a lot lately. Why is it important to know about this place?

1 What is the Amazon?

When you hear the word *Amazon*, you might think of the online shopping website. But the Amazon we're talking about is the world's biggest tropical rainforest. It's located on the continent of South America.

The Amazon rainforest is known for its **biodiversity**. Millions of species of insects, fish, birds, and mammals live there. Experts estimate that a new plant or animal species is discovered in the Amazon every two days!

"The Amazon is home to more species of plants and animals than any other land ecosystem on the planet," says scientist Robin Chazdon.



*French Guiana isn't a country. It's a territory of the country of France.

2 What's going on there?

Fires are raging—thousands of them. According to experts, there have been more than 90,000 fires so far this year. The fires are creating so much thick smoke that it can be seen from space.



3 How did the fires start?

Most fires in the Amazon are due to human activity, such as **deforestation**. People cut down and burn trees to clear land for farms or cattle ranches. Some deforestation in Brazil is legal and has been going on for many years. The Amazon has long been used for food and farming. But experts say more people have been burning land illegally recently. This year has seen the largest number of fires in the Amazon since 2010.

This affects more than just the animals that live in the rainforest. More than 30 million people call the rainforest region home too.

RAINFOREST

4 That sounds bad, but the Amazon is really far away from where I live. Why should I care about it?

Rainforests help keep the entire planet healthy. So an enormous one like the Amazon is especially important. The rainforest's billions of trees and other plants release oxygen. That's a key ingredient in the air we breathe.

The Amazon rainforest's trees and other plants also pull a gas called carbon dioxide out of the air. Burning the trees releases carbon dioxide. Too much of the gas is bad for Earth. Carbon dioxide and other harmful gases can act like a blanket, trapping some of the sun's heat in Earth's atmosphere. This warms up the planet.

WORDS TO KNOW

biodiversity *noun*. the variety of plants and animals that live in a region

deforestation *noun*. the act of cutting down or burning down all the trees in an area

5 Will the Amazon recover?

No one knows for sure. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that humans have destroyed nearly 20 percent of the Amazon over the past 50 years. If the loss continues at that rate, millions of species would be in danger.

Many people are calling on Brazil's government to crack down on illegal tree clearing and create stricter rules about deforestation. And people, organizations, and governments worldwide are stepping in to help stop the fires.

"The fires have helped people realize that we are all part of the same planet," says Chazdon.

—by Tricia Culligan

The two-toed sloth, one of the slowest animals on Earth, lives in the treetops of the Amazon.

Before

After

**CLICK
HERE**

Take a virtual trip
to the Amazon
rainforest.

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