**McDonald's New Happy Meal Ads. Healthy or Misleading?**

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The new McDonald's Happy Meal commercial emphasizes apples, not toys. McDonald's is giving kids a new reason to buy their Happy Meals, and it doesn't involve toys. An ad campaign launching Friday hopes to teach kids to hit the Golden Arches because it's healthy.

Yes, those Golden Arches. The cartoon spot will follow a boy named Ferris who teaches his friend, an over-indulgent goat, to pick fruit and dairy over things like paper and baseballs. During a trip to McDonald's.

Not only are there no freebie action figures, there's not a single burger in the entire commercial. Could that be a first for McDonald's?

It's a stretch for a chain that relies on deep fryers and "pink slime" to carry out orders. But recent additions to the kids' menu -- from apple slices to low fat milk -- are changing the brand's image, or at least attempting to. Now that Happy Meals come with fewer fries and a choice of apple slices, the calorie count has dropped by 20 percent. But the bulk of the meal is still grease-laden.

In recent years, the fast food brand has been singled out as a contributor to the childhood obesity epidemic. Accused of luring kids to fattening, processed foods with the promise of free toys and brightly colored mascots, McDonald's reputation had gone from kid-friendly to parental nightmare. Part of making nice with both health advocates and parents was not only healthier menu options but a pledge to include a nutritional message in any communication directed at kids.

Ferris and his goat are one part of a larger marketing overhaul designed to teach kids healthier approaches to ordering, and teach parents that McDonald's is totally on their side.

So far, the ad campaign has won over some tough critics of the burger giant. One children's advertising specialist for the Better Business Bureau called the spots "outstanding." McDonald's knows how to captivate children through advertising; they spend a fortune on focus groups and marketing strategies to do just that. But this is the first time they've focused their efforts on effective ways to teach kids about nutrition. To many, that's a step in the right direction.

But Ronald and company still have their critics. There are those who are concerned less with the message that with who's providing it.

"I think having a positive message is actually confusing if the bottom-line message is that coming to McDonald's will make you happy," children's media advocate Susan Linn told the Chicago Tribune.

"What we want is for McDonald's to get out of the way, for parents to do their job to teach their children about nutrition," added public health attorney Michele Simon.

At the end of the commercial, Ferris eats his Happy Meal complete with apples and low-fat milk. But he also has a stack of McNuggets and fries. Can a fast food joint really convey a nutritious message alongside its deep-fried staples? Will kids confuse the (very similarly drawn) chicken bites with the apple wedges or identify good health with fast food just because of an order of fat-free milk? It's these concerns that have a children's advocate group like the Campaign for Commercial-free Childhood against McDonald's marketing to kids, period.

What do you think: Are the new health-conscious Happy Meal ads better or worse for kids?

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