

Children and Food: Public Policy Informed by Science

Marlene B. Schwartz, Ph.D.

Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders
Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity
Yale University Department of Psychology

The food environment

Poor Foods

Highly accessible

Convenient

Good tasting

Promoted heavily

Inexpensive

Healthy Foods

Less accessible

Less convenient

Worse tasting

Not promoted

More expensive

Possible Remedies

- Treat unhealthful foods like cigarettes – stop advertising to kids, ban from schools
- Tell people to be more personally responsible, eat all foods in moderation, and exercise more
- Change the environment so it is easier to eat better, and harder to eat worse

Some progress

- Easier to eat better
 - CT mandate for healthy alternatives
 - apple slices instead of French fries
 - salad bars at schools and restaurants
- But, most children are still choosing the unhealthy foods

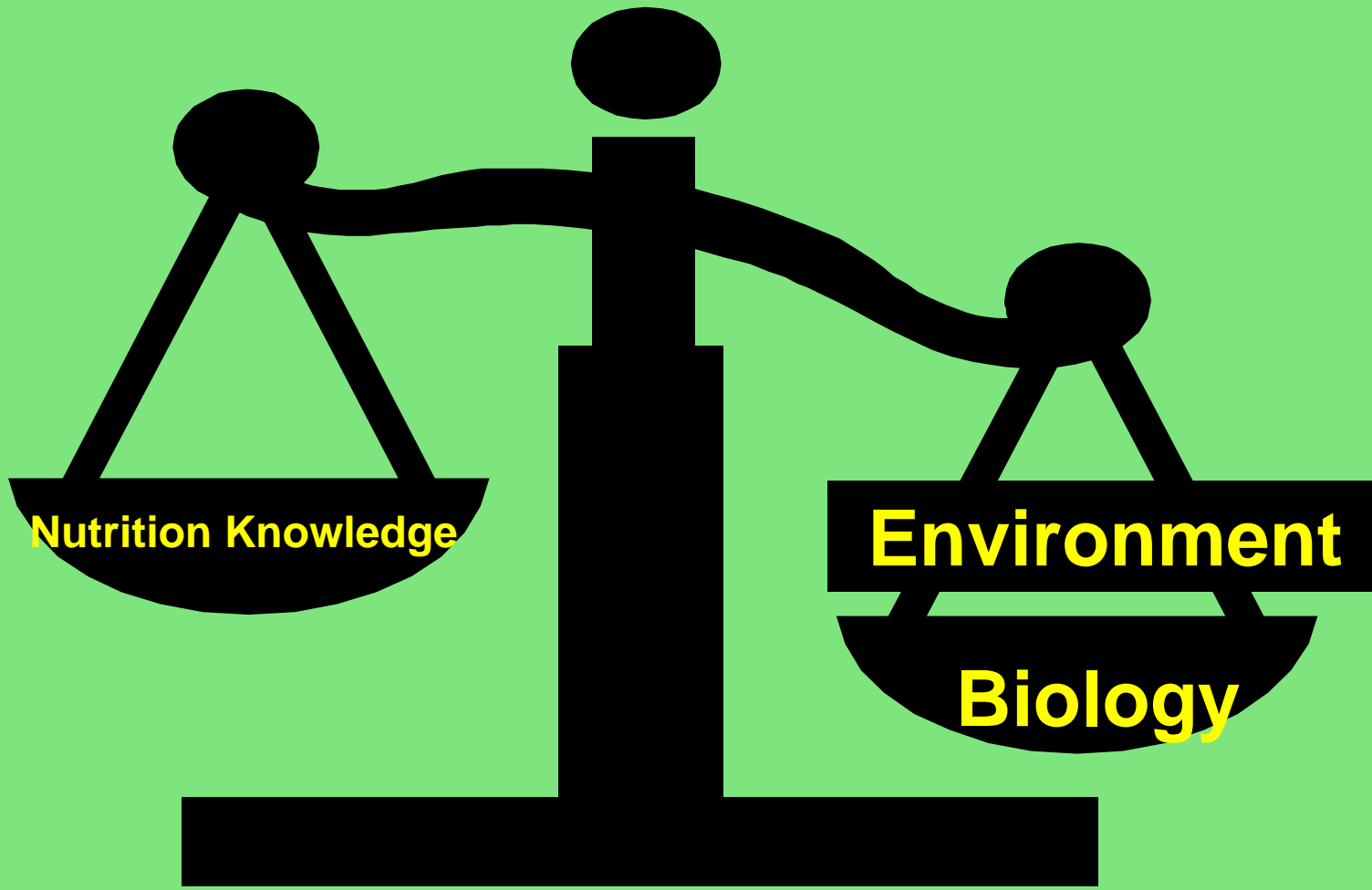
Why aren't children choosing
the "healthy choices"?











Nutrition Knowledge

Environment

Biology



Environment

Nutrition Knowledge

Biology

You're com'n
with me!



What about “sometimes” foods?

- “Is it sometimes now?” – Cookie Monster
- The problem of variable reinforcement
- Moderation and sometimes are too vague
- Establish rules for predictable access

Establish rules for predictable access

- Return control to parents
- Keep “sometimes” foods out of the school environment
- Schools currently undermine parental efforts to limit their children’s intake
- Let parents decide how / when to provide those foods

Connecticut Bill #1309

- Beverages allowed to be sold in schools:
 - water, milk, 100% juice
- High schools can also sell
 - diet soda and sports drinks
 - 30 minutes past last lunch period
- All snacks sold must meet certain nutritional guidelines
- 20 minutes of recess for K – 5th grade
- Form School Wellness Committees

Conclusions

- Real change in eating requires real change in the environment
- We are more vulnerable to environmental influences that we like to admit
- Children and parents deserve schools that provide the best possible environment
- Right now, foods are innocent until proven guilty
- Burden of proof must shift – what is the health impact of selling a particular food in schools?