

# Healthy Choices are “Fun Bites” in Pinellas County (FL)

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## Summary

DOH-Pinellas, via its PICH grant, strives to make the healthy choice the easy choice. The Fun Bites initiative works on the back end with concessionaires to do that by providing technical assistance to offer the items for sale and then working the front end to spotlight nutritious choices on menu selections with its orange brand. Young athletes in baseball leagues, swim meets and recreational camps have been receptive to having more choices at concession stands. Operators have not reported fewer sales or negative comments from customers.

## Challenge

Obesity in adults is already a crisis in America. Unfortunately, obesity in children is headed in that direction, too. An estimated 29 to 33.5 percent of preschoolers in Pinellas County are overweight or obese, as are 1 in 3 high-school students. The conditions that lead to a lower quality of life in adults—hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol among them—are also affecting children. Part of the solution is to make nutritious choices easier for families managing after-school activities for their children. For families with children involved in youth sports, finding healthier snack options at their league’s concession stand is often difficult. The challenge facing the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County (DOH-Pinellas) was to encourage youth sports concession operators to add items lower in fat, sodium and sugar to their menus to give families a choice.

## Solution

To support good snack choices at youth sports leagues, DOH-Pinellas created the “Fun Bites” initiative. Its coordinator visits concessions to let them know that they can add healthy offerings without taking away any of the familiar snack foods usually offered. The Fun Bites nutritionist provides listings of items that meet USDA Smart Snacks in Schools guidelines for sodium, fat and sugar. These items are identified on menu boards with the Fun Bites brand that looks like an orange with a bite taken out. Fun Bites provides technical assistance on how many items to add, where to place them, how to price them competitively and how to get the word out to parents.



## Your Involvement is Key

**The PICH grant continues to promote Fun Bites to youth concession operators via paid and earned media and its staff has presented at statewide and national conferences. The Fun Bites can provide technical assistance to other communities that want to adopt the initiative. A parent was quoted in earned media describing Fun Bites as, "It's good to give them something that will give them back some energy and some vitamins versus straight sugar or junk."**

## Results

The first concession stands to adopt Fun Bites were city facilities in Largo, FL. Operators found that the healthy items they added increased sales and were popular with customers. After their positive experience, the city added Fun Bites at other to add healthy items to menus. As Fun Bites has grown, youth sports leagues in the Countryside area of Clearwater, St. Petersburg and the Palm Harbor area have also adopted the Fun Bites program. Countryside's kickoff garnered earned media on local network affiliate news programs. The soundbites by concession operators, Fun Bites staff and from families painted a positive picture of the decision to offer healthier items. The initiative used paid media in the Tampa Bay area's major daily newspaper and in minority publications to spread the word.

### Contact

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*"There are some nights when.... this is their meal so it's important in our view as the board, as the league, to provide healthier options to our families." Matt Werner, president of Countryside Little League*

- Matt Werner

## Sustainable Success

Fun Bites can continue as long as there's an interest in using nutritional standards to provide more choices at snack stands. After grant funding ends, point-of-sale equipment may not be offered but nutritionists at DOH-Pinellas can continue to serve as resources for those interested. The initiative will sustain itself as more communities and leagues choose to promote healthier choices labeled with the orange brand. St. Petersburg, Pinellas County's largest city, has its own Healthy St. Pete program that has Fun Bites as one of its components at its facilities. These efforts spun off from Fun Bites and PICH; they can continue after the grant ends.

