In the United States, about 45 million children participate in youth sports. Snacks make up about 28% of a child’s daily energy intake. Children who participate in sports are more physically active when compared to children who do not participate. Participating does not ensure that children are meeting the physical activity recommendations. Children who participate in sports consume more unhealthy foods and a greater number of calories overall. Snacks brought to youth sports events are often pre-packaged convenience foods. Snacks usually equal to 300-500 more calories. A small percentage of parents are dissatisfied with snacks found in recreational sports.

Purpose Statement
The purpose of this thesis was to evaluate factors that influence parents’ choices on team snacks for children after participating in an organized basketball program.

Research Questions
1. What factors influence parents’ decision in snack selection for kids participating in youth sports?
2. How do parents perceive the current snack environment?
3. What do parents consider a “healthy” snack?

Methods
Sample
- Convenience sampling
- Parents with children between 4 and 13 years, participating in Orange Coast Optimist youth basketball program were eligible to participate

Instrumentation
- 13 item survey was created
- 3 Closed-ended questions
- 4 Open-ended questions
- 2 Demographic questions

Procedures
- Parents were recruited in person, on-site the day of their child’s practice.
- Invitation to participate was done orally.
- Interested parents were given an informed consent form.
- Parents who returned the consent form back signed were given a survey.
- Parents returned the survey to the principal investigator when they were finished.

Data Analysis
- Descriptive statistics was used to analyze closed-ended and demographic questions.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyze open-ended questions.

Sample Demographics
- A total of 99 parents completed the survey.
- Of those that responded, 42% (n=42) were female, and 58% (n=54) were male.
- Looking at age, 3% (n=3) were between 25-34 years, 57.6% (n=57) between 35-44 years, and 36.4% (n=36) between 45-55 years.
- Nearly all participants packed a team snack at least once during the season (n=93, 94%), while only 6% (n=6) did not.
- More than half of the parents did not want to see changes made to team snacks (n=63, 63.6%), while 35.4% (n=35) reported they would like to see changes.

Factors Influencing Parental Decision on Team Snack Selection
- Two closed-ended questions were used to answer research question 1.
- Parents were asked to list their three most important factors that affected team snack selection.
  - For the first factor, a majority listed child snack preference (n=28, 28.2%), followed by convenience (n=20, 20.2%) and health (n=19, 19.2%).
  - For their second factor, most listed health (n=36, 36.4%), child preference (n=21, 21.2%), and convenience (n=19, 19.2%).
  - For the third factor, most listed cost (n=25, 25.3%) followed by health (n=18, 18.2) and convenience (n=18, 18.2).
- Parents were also asked to rank the level of importance of various factors when choosing team snacks.
  - Convenience (n=55, 55.6%), child’s snack preference (n=53, 53.5%), health (n=41, 41.4%), and cost (n=41, 41.4%) were most frequently reported as “important.”
  - Figure 1 displays the rest of the results.

Emerging Themes
- Responses to the 4 open-ended questions were used to answer research questions 2 & 3.
- Table 1 below provides identified themes and supporting quotes.

Table 1. Themes and supporting quotes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>“Less sugar drinks; maybe replace with toys or inexpensive rewards rather than excessive sugar snacks.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>“No sugar or low sugar drinks.”</td>
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<tr>
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<td>“Low sugar drinks”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portion</td>
<td>“…I trust the other parents to have the same concerns in our children’s health and to make the same decisions I would make.”</td>
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<td>Example Snack Content</td>
<td>“Less choices/less portions.”</td>
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Conclusions
- Youth sports offer an opportunity to establish healthy lifestyle habits.
- Sports promote physical activity, however, the food environment that surrounds it may not be conducive to fitness and health.
- Overall, most parents listed health, convenience, child’s snack preference, and cost as main factors that influence team snack selection.
- More than half (n=63, 63.6%) of parents do not wish to see changes made to team snacks.
- Of the 35% (n=35) that did not want changes, parents generally desired healthier snacks and snacks lower in sugar.
- Fruit was commonly mentioned as an appropriate snack.
- Almost all parents agreed that snacks high in sugar and snacks that contain common allergens should never be given out as part of team snacks.

Recommendations for Future Research
- Future research may want to use focus groups within this population to develop more complete answers.
- Future research may also want to look into parental opinion on snacking guidelines.
- Focus on how parents would like to receive this information.
- Also, on what types of information parents would like to receive.

References

Acknowledgments
I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Gray, and the rest of my committee Dr. Barrack & Dr. Blaine for all of their help. And to Simin, a special thank you for helping me code all my data. Lastly, thank you to my family and friends for supporting me through this whole process.

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