

# Skating centers can reap benefits by encouraging healthy lifestyles

By Carole Donahue, Partnerships Coordinator and Co-Founder of SOSMentor ShapeUp and Dr. Susan Shapiro, SOSMentor ShapeUp Board Member and Registered Dietitian

Roller skating centers are always looking for avenues to create additional business – and what better way than to encourage healthy lifestyles for both young and old alike?! By promoting healthy eating in rinks and offering incentives for exercise, it can be a win-win situation for rink owners and operators and local families in your community.

There is even an organization that has set up a plan to help skating centers and other businesses do just that. The Los Angeles-based SOSMentor ShapeUp organization was created to teach children how to redefine their eating habits, improve their fitness activities, commit to long-term fitness goals, and ultimately, to facilitate a nurturing environment.

The program was put together by Carole Donahue, co-founder of the SOSMentor ShapeUp and Dr. Susan Shapiro, an SOS ShapeUp board member and registered dietician.

The organization's multi-tiered mentoring approach starts with a 10-week program where adult mentors coach high school students so that they can then mentor middle-school and elementary students. Following are the 10 steps Donahue and Shapiro recommend.

## Encourage your skaters to move more and get plenty of physical activity.

Encourage customers to find time to get their bodies moving. When they move, they make their bones and muscles stronger. They also energize their bodies and help bodies and minds to respond better to stress as they can think more clearly.

While it would be great if everyone had 60 minutes a day to exercise for physical and mental health, 20 to 30 minutes daily is also helpful. Exercise is cumulative, so rink operators should encourage customers to make every little bit count.

Let patrons know that exercise makes their bodies a more efficient user of calories. They can lose weight this way and become leaner and healthier because their hearts are benefitting from exercise. By doing so, fluids and nutrients are reaching every part of their bodies.

## Suggest skaters drink eight to ten glasses of water per day.

Remind customers that their bodies are over 60 percent water. They

need liquid to help transport nutrients, minerals and energy to every part of their body. Water and other non-calorie liquids help keep everyone healthy and functioning at their best. Drinking water also helps remove toxins and other waste products from the body.

## Remind them not to skip meals, especially breakfast.

Breakfast is the energy start for the day. Let your skating center customers know that when they skip meals,



they rob the body of the fuel it needs to function and do such things as stay awake and handle stress. Make them aware that when they finally do slow down, the hunger will creep up on them, which can lead to overeating and making unhealthy food choices.

## Help them limit portion size.

Most of the food people eat when eating out, even at skating and entertainment centers, is enough to feed two or three people. Therefore, let customers know that they can still order all the great food you have available and have some left over for later. It's a way for people to get the nutrients they need without the excess calories.

## Go lean with protein.

All the food we get from animals, such as cheese, milk, meat, eggs, fish, chicken, sausage and more are naturally high in fat. However, it is possible to provide these to your skaters with less fat. Offer one percent or skim milk, non-fat yogurt, and lean meat. Also, it is best to prepare those foods baked, broiled or grilled, not fried. Incorporate those options into your skating center when possible.

## Help them limit fat intake.

For customer's health, read the labels of the food you buy. The calories everyone should get from fat should be less than 30 percent of the total calories in that food. For example, a food label

that lists the total amount of fat as eight grams with a total of 160 calories actually means that one gram of fat provides nine calories. With 72 of the total calories coming from fat, that means almost half of the calories come from fat.

## Offer whole grains.

By offering customers whole grains, you are providing them with more nutrients like vitamins, minerals and fiber than by providing more processed grains. This also provides skaters with long-term fuel for their bodies.

## Help them limit sugar intake.

Sugar in food is listed as total carbohydrate on a label. It can also be listed as dietary fiber and sugars. If 50 percent or more of the total carbs come from sugars, that constitutes a high-sugar food. These foods are especially hard for kids to turn down, so it is important to instead encourage skaters to choose from other food groups.

Provide a rainbow of fruits and vegetables from which they can choose.

Offer more fruits and vegetables to your skaters. They are filled with vitamins, minerals and water. Most are a good source of fiber and contain antioxidants. They are a good alternative

to candy and other high-sugar foods as they supply the body with an immediate source of energy.

## Offer more calcium-rich foods.

Skating center operators all want their skaters to have strong bones, muscles and teeth. The body uses calcium to help muscles contract for the expansion and contraction of blood vessels. When hormones and enzymes that these foods provide are secreted, this helps the nervous system function properly. This is why young and old alike should eat four or more servings of calcium-rich foods each day. The richest sources of absorbable calcium come from dairy foods such as milk, cheese, ice cream and yogurt. There are low-fat versions of all of these that you can offer your skaters.

Healthy skaters can be your skaters for a lifetime. They are more likely to be able to think more clearly and be safe customers as well. Parents will appreciate that you offer their children healthy alternatives. Therefore, you win with long-lasting patrons, the children win with better health and their parents win by seeing healthier kids grow into young adults. Push the wins at your skating center.

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