



# Have Kids' Meals Become Healthier? Progress and Public Relations

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**YALE RUDD CENTER**  
FOR FOOD POLICY & OBESITY

# Presenter Disclosures

Marlene Schwartz

No relationships to disclose

# Children request fast food

- 89% of parents report taking their child to a fast food restaurant at least once the past week
- No longer a “special treat”
- 49% of parents - child asks to go to McDonald’s at least once a week
- 15% of preschoolers ask to go McDonald’s every day

# Has nutrition improved?

- Calculated nutrition quality to evaluate change in kids' meals between February 2010 & February 2013.

**McDonald's**

**Wendy's**

**Burger King**

**Sonic**

**KFC**

**Subway**

**Taco Bell**

**Dairy Queen**

# What changed

- Added healthy beverages
- Added healthy sides
- Increased number of kids' meal combinations by 54%
- But still don't meet nutrition standards

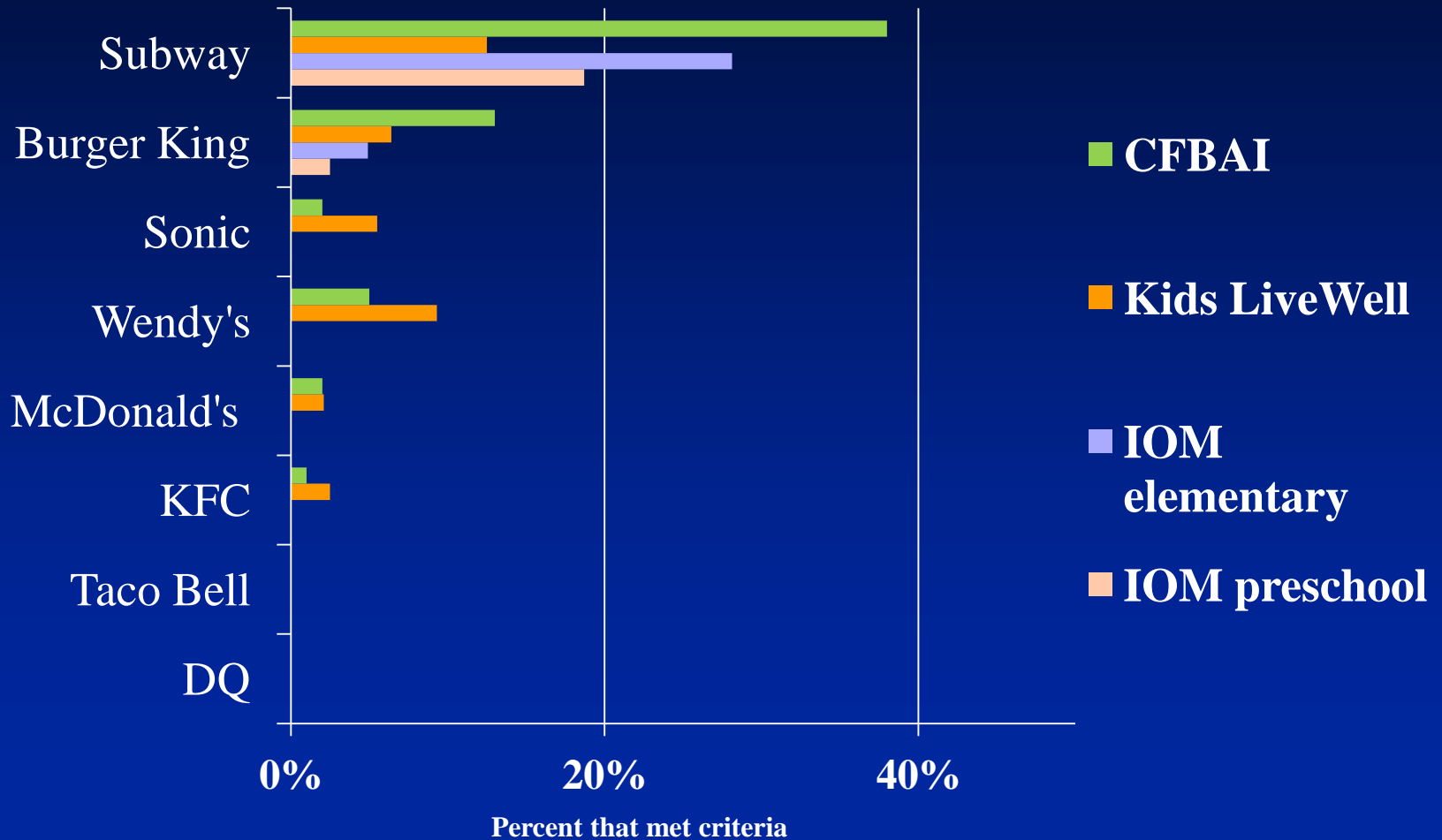
# Kids' meal combinations: Met preschool-age nutrition criteria

- 2010
  - 12 of 3,039 kids' meal combinations (.4%) met all preschool nutrition criteria.
- 2013
  - 11 of 4,695 kids' meal combinations (.2%) met all preschool nutrition criteria.

# Kids' meal combinations: Met elementary-age nutrition criteria

- 2010
  - 15 of 3,039 kids' meal combinations (.5%) met all elementary nutrition criteria.
- 2013
  - 19 of 4,695 kids' meal combinations (.4%) met all elementary nutrition criteria.

# Percent of kids' meal combinations that meet standards (2013)





# What did not change

- 97% do not meet CFBAI new uniform category specific standards
- 97% do not meet Kids Live Well
- Main dish items remained the least nutritious component of most kids' meals.
  
- Why? No whole grains, no vegetables, high levels of saturated fat, sodium, and sugar and low fiber

# What doesn't work

- Introduce lots of options
- Set standards that only need to be met by one option
  
- What does work?
- Healthy defaults

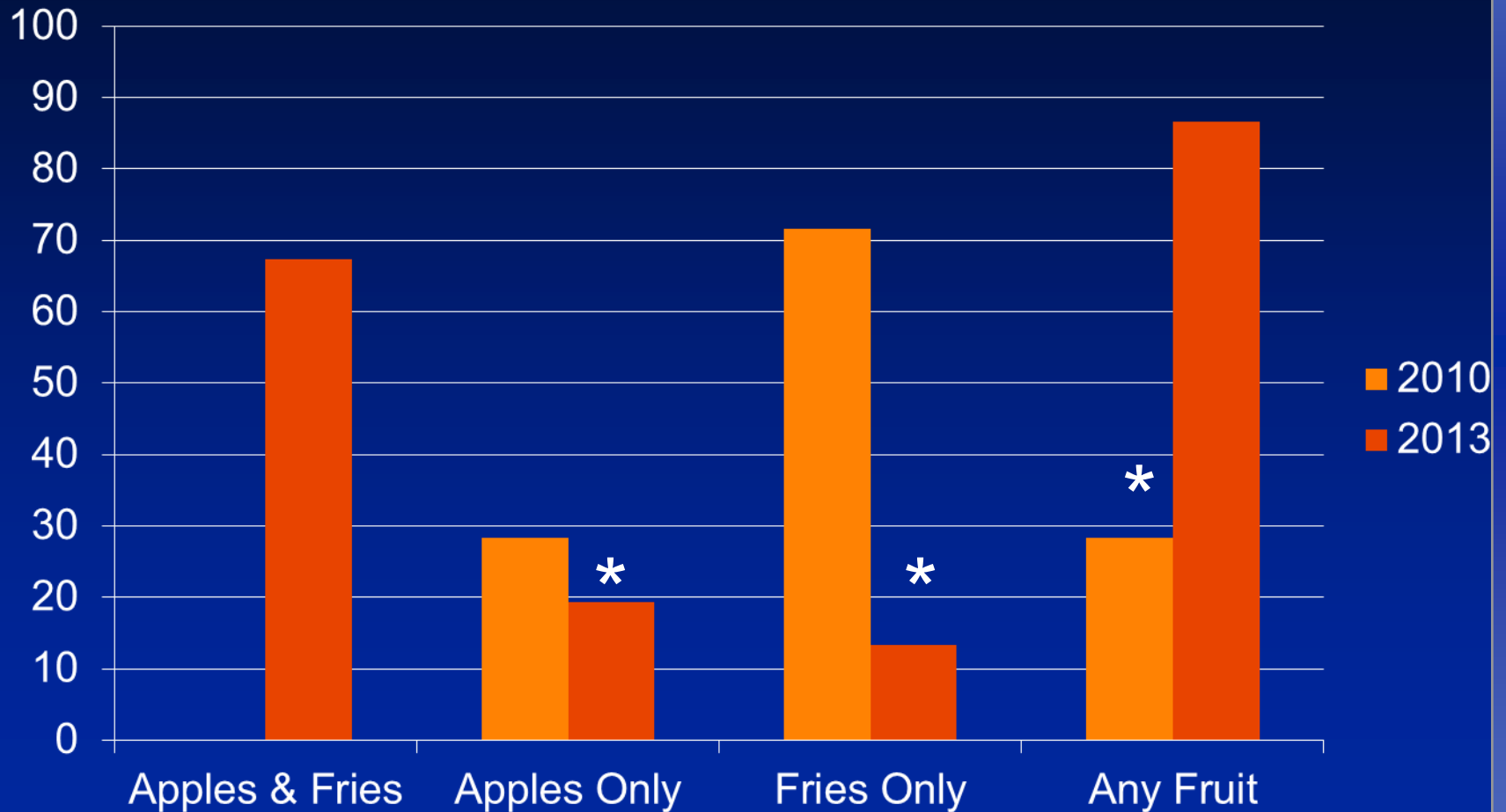
# Apple Slices or French Fries?

- July 26, 2011- McDonald's changed the default side options for its kids' meal to include a smaller portion of fries in the Happy Meal and a portion of apples in all kids' meals (Happy Meal and Mighty Kids' Meal).
- No changes to default drink option.
- Also in July 2011, Burger King said that soft drinks and fries were no longer the default options (L.A. Times, 2011)

# Evaluation of McDonald's change in default sides

- **Hypothesis:** The new default sides will significantly increase the proportion of children receiving fruit with a McDonald's kids' meal.
- **Methods:** Cross-sectional study utilizing online questionnaire. Data collected in 2010 & 2013. Pre and post McDonald's 2011 change in default sides.

# McDonald's Kids' Meal Side Item Selections in 2010 and 2013

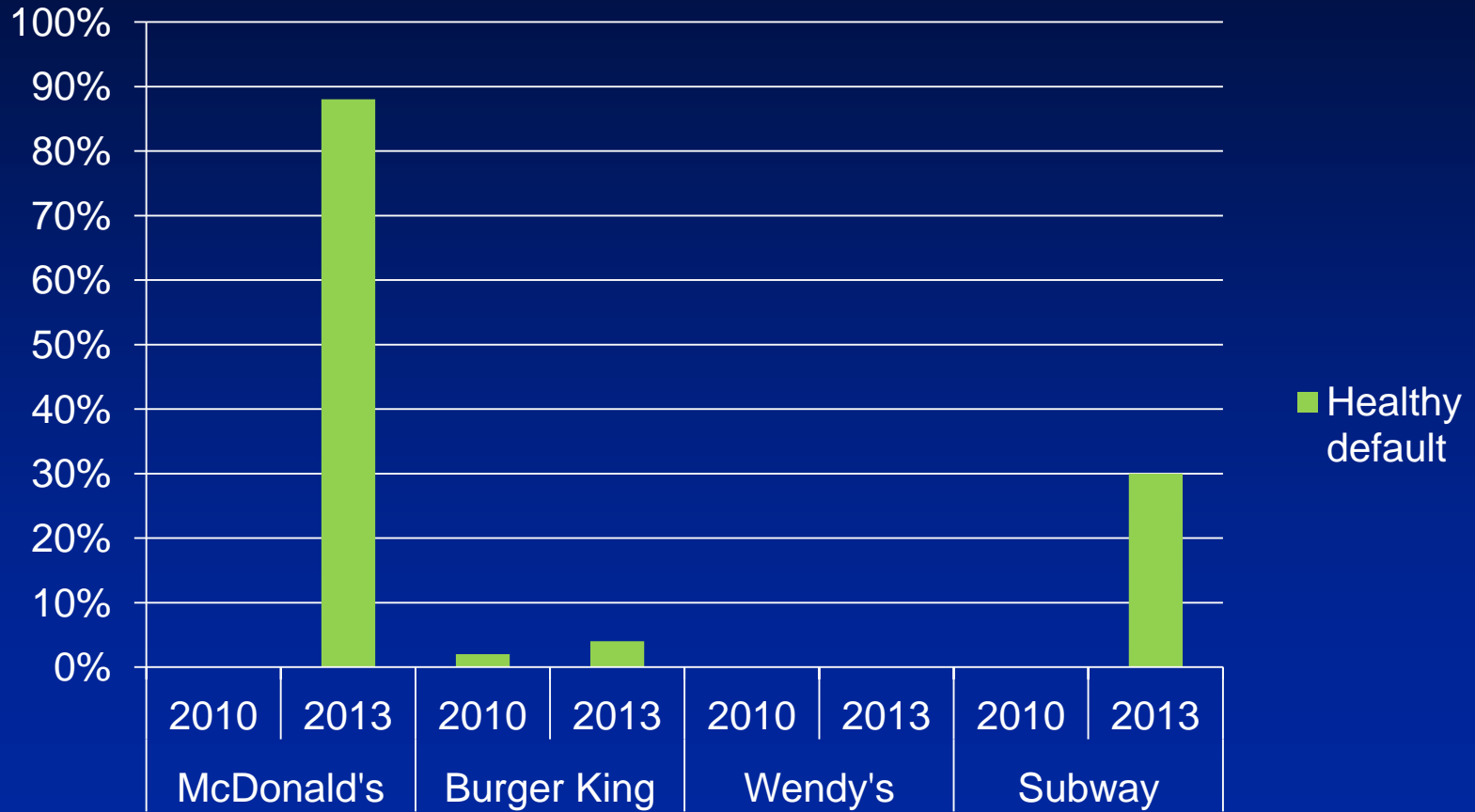


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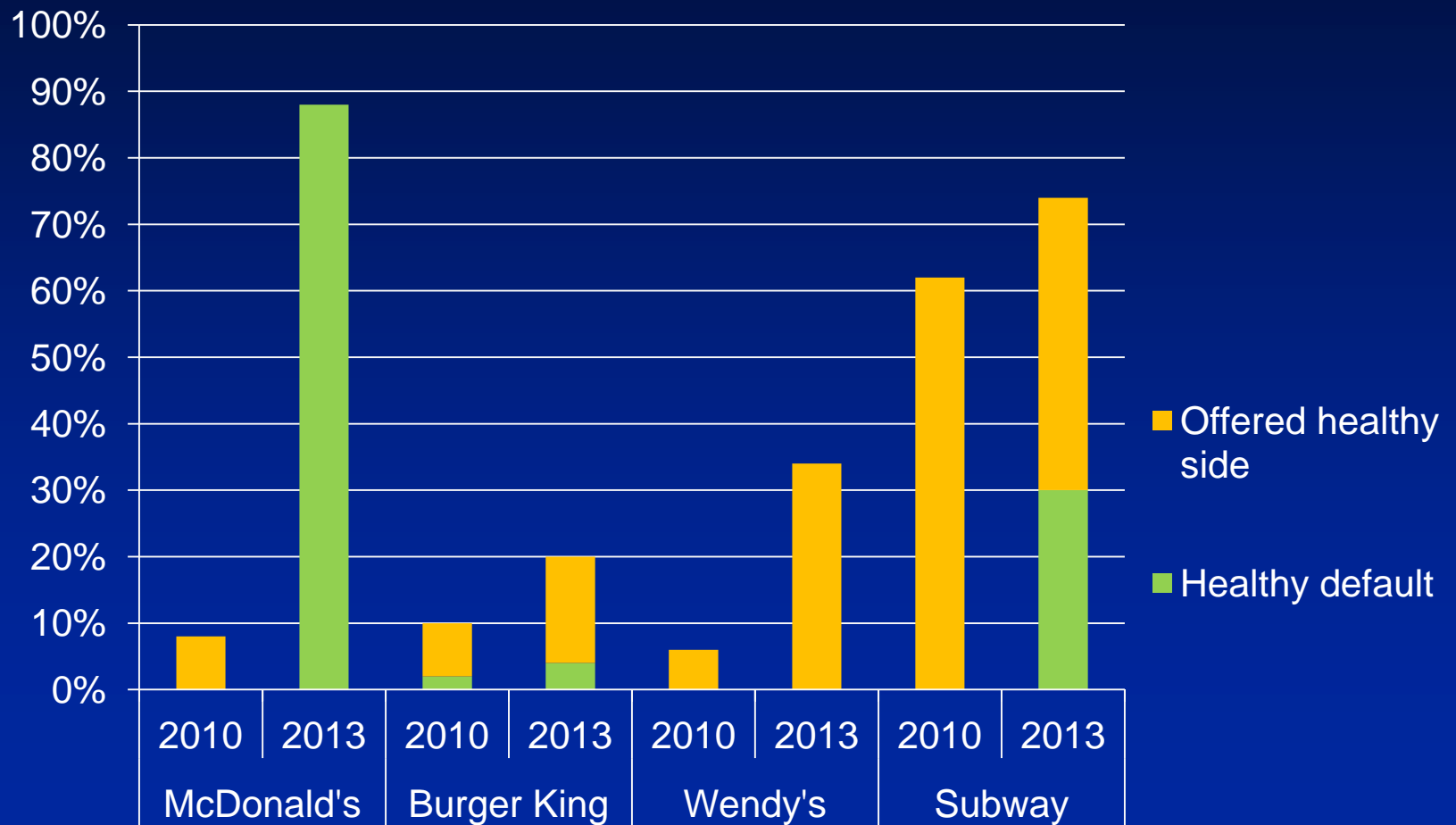
# Sales Practices Audit

- Comparison 2010 & 2013
- 200 restaurants national sample
  - 50 each: McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Subway
- Field personnel request children's meal
  - Hamburger / roast beef sandwich
- Side and beverage provided automatically
- If given a choice, bought the first item offered

# Healthy Default Side

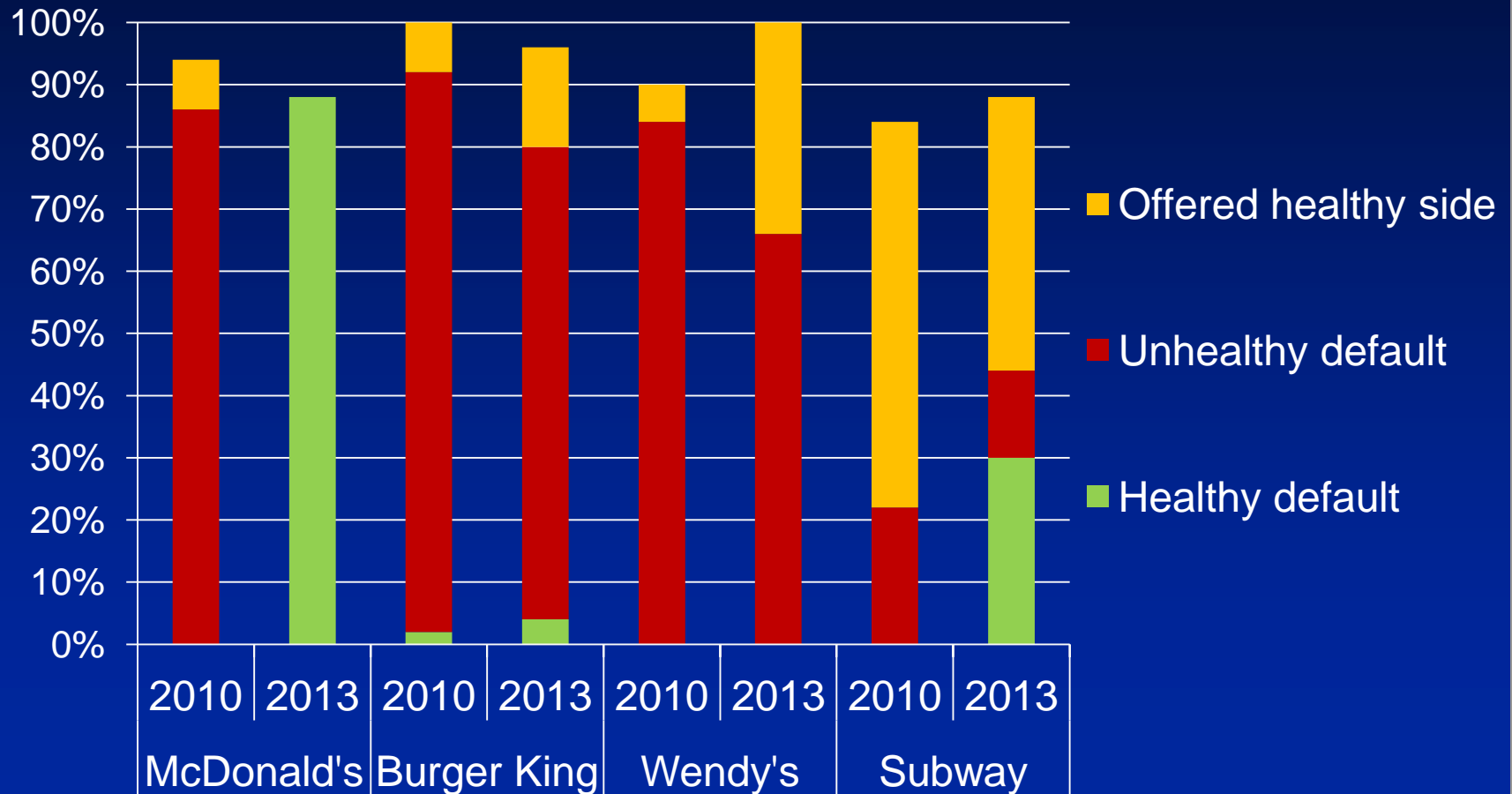


# Offered Healthy Side

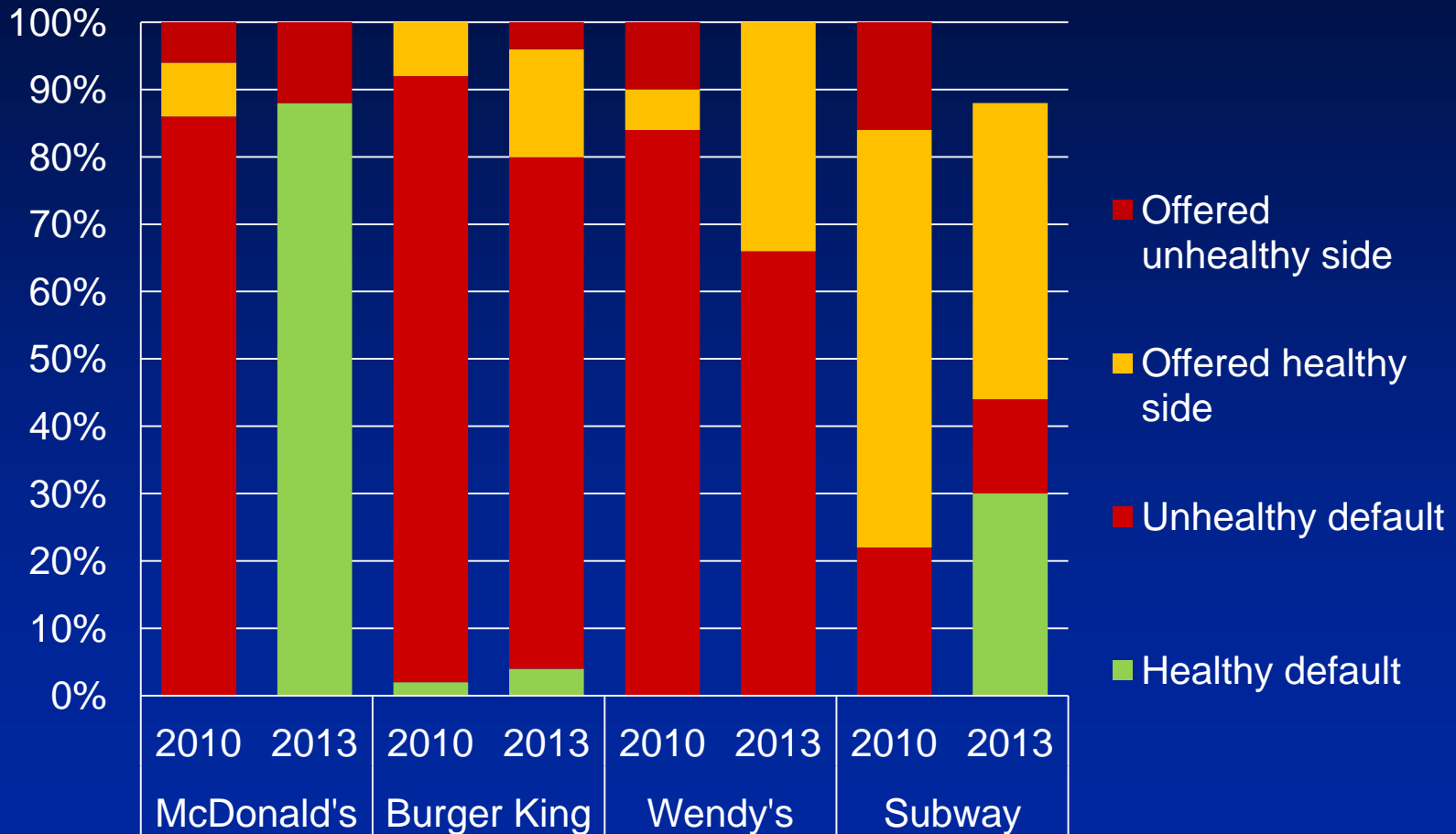




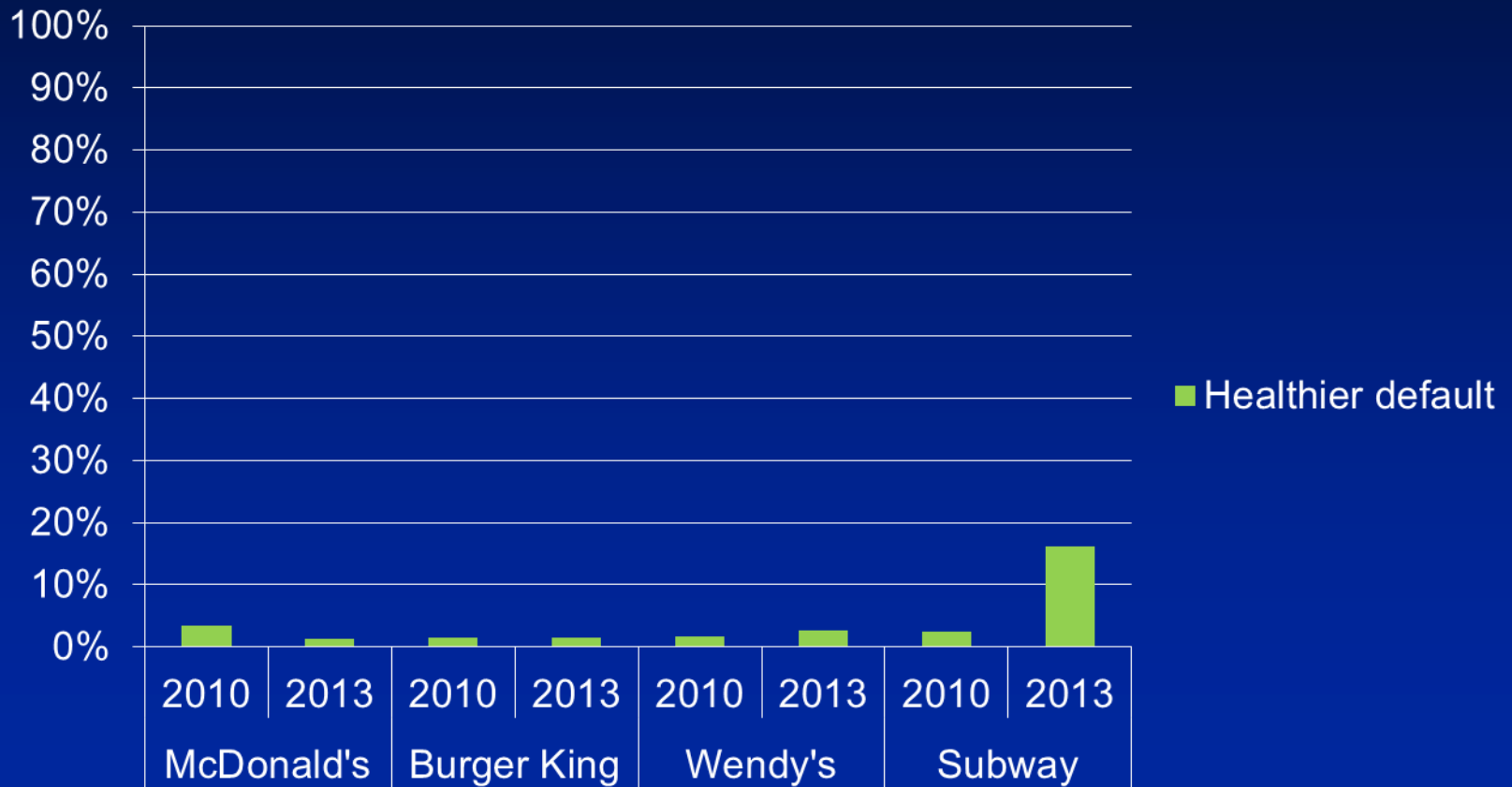
# Unhealthy Default Side



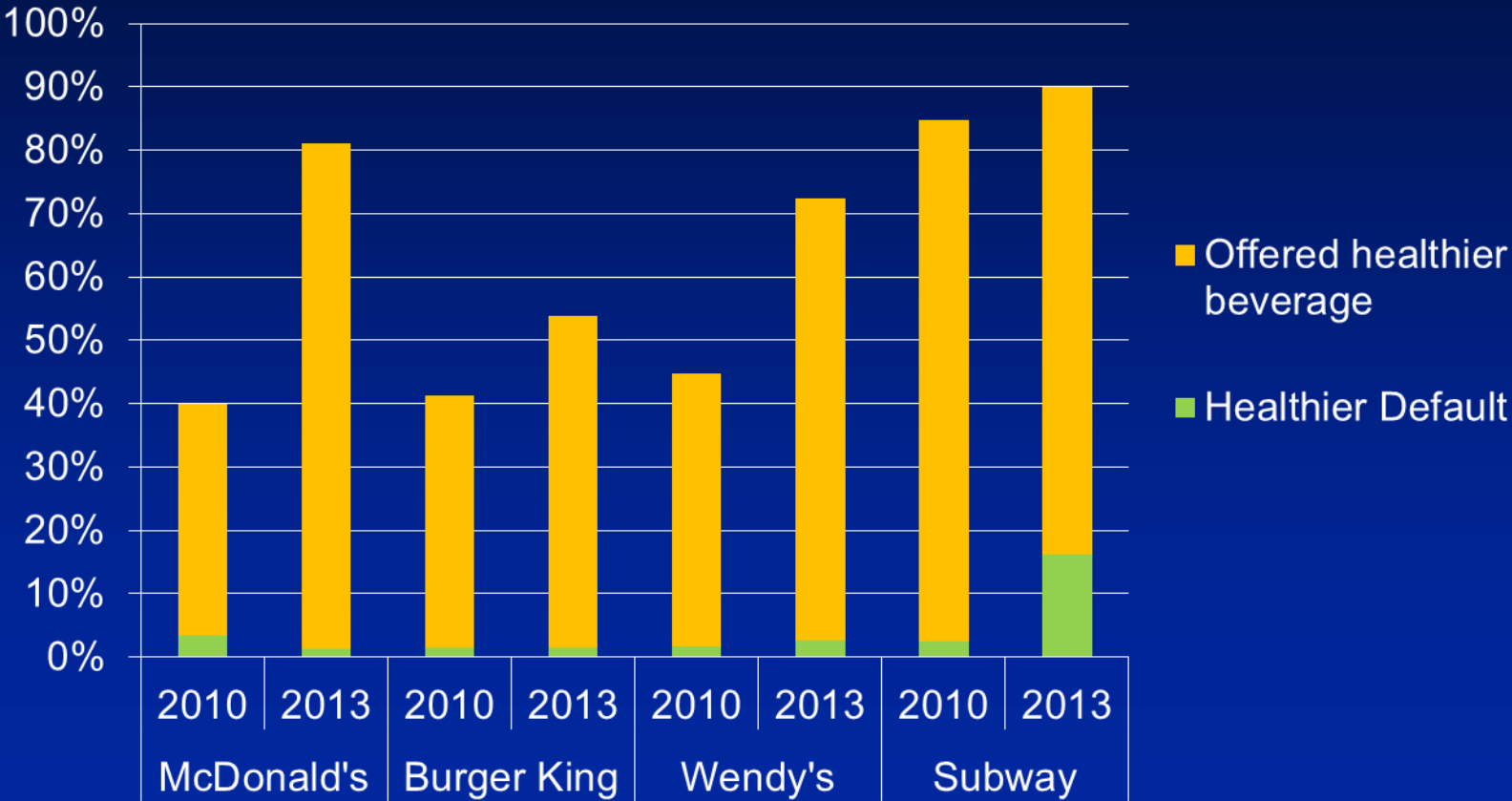
# Offered Unhealthy Side



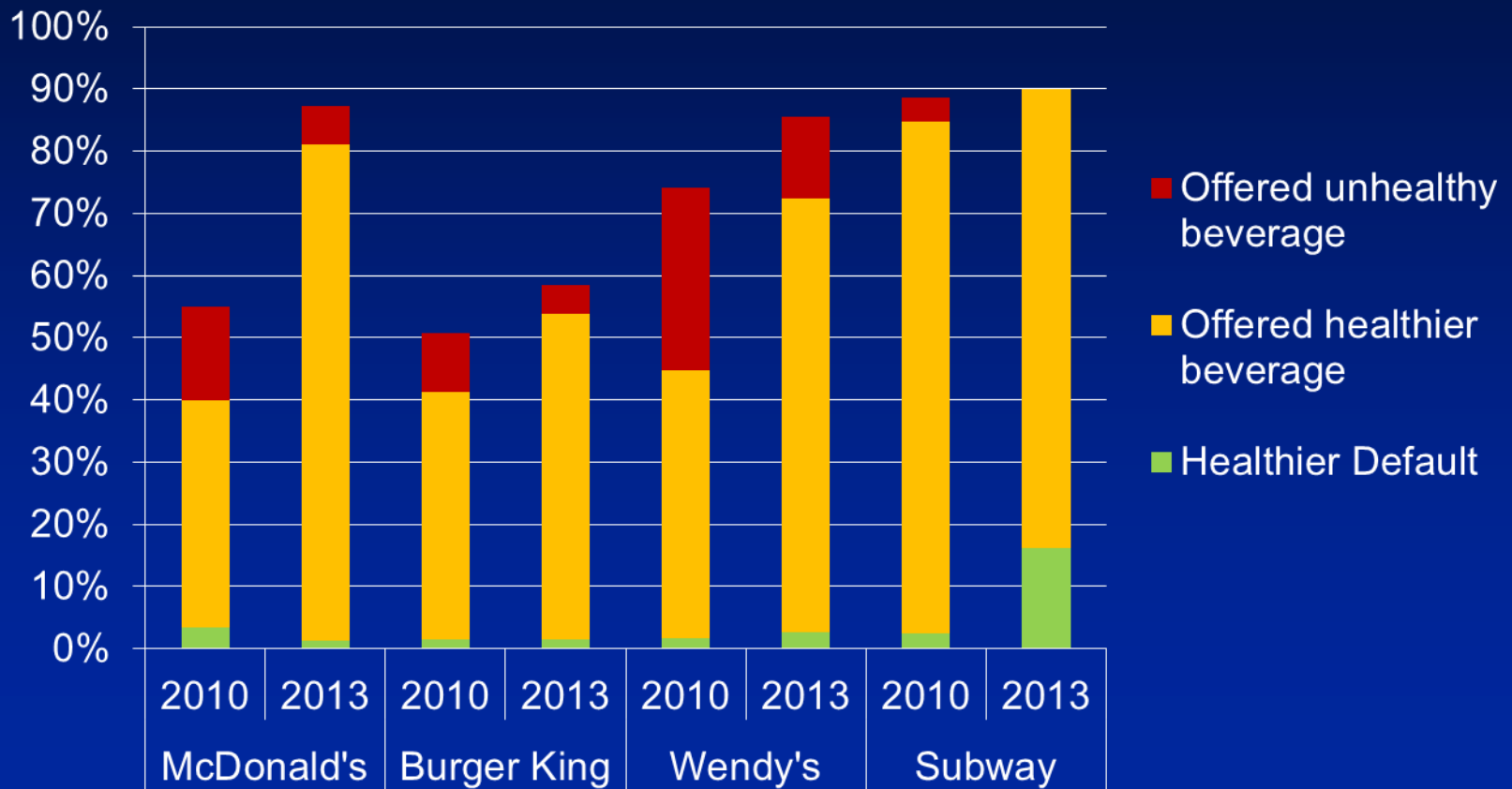
# Healthier Default Beverage



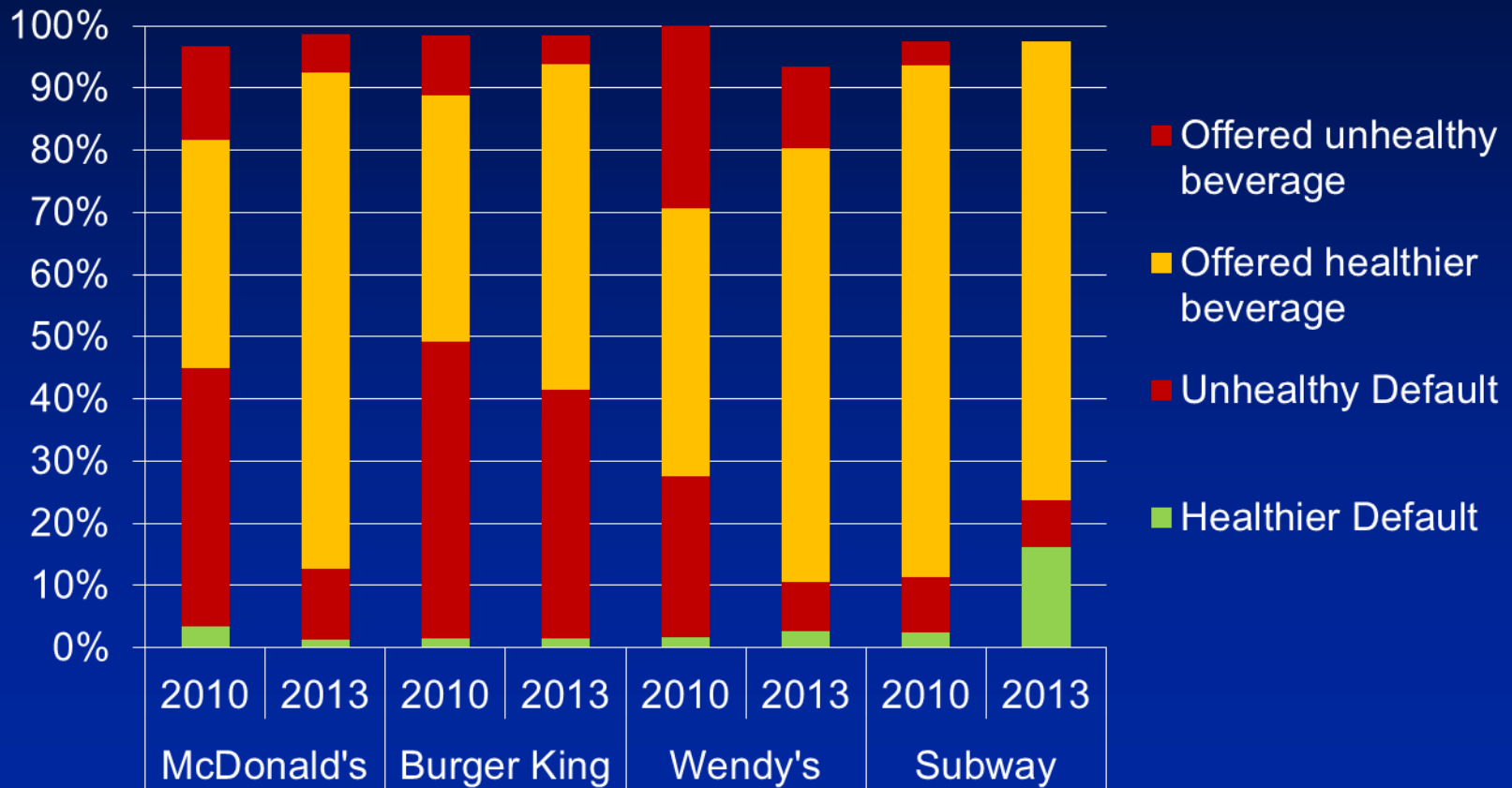
# Offered Healthier Beverage



# Offered Unhealthy Beverage



# Unhealthy Default Beverage



# Recommendations

- Every restaurant should offer healthy sides, beverages and main dishes in kids' meals
- These should be the default
- The majority of possible kids' meal combinations should meet industry standards

For lists of the best and worst meals  
and interactive tools for parents:

[Fastfoodmarketing.org](http://Fastfoodmarketing.org)



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# Thank you

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[Fastfoodmarketing.org](http://Fastfoodmarketing.org)

[YaleRuddCenter.org](http://YaleRuddCenter.org)