

# Fast food and obesity

[Food & Diet](#), [Junk Food](#)



Fast food and Obesity When one thinks about food, the first thing that might jump to one's mind would be the delicious home made mother's special roast, or for many it might be a cultural dish that westerners do not recognise as the perfect meal but still is respectively for those who adore it. However those days have long gone when a perfectly cooked meal was an everyday occurring. With a fast paced life in the western world the invention and development of fast food (industry) has grown like a contagious virus under favourable conditions. The objective of this literature review is to investigate ' The commercialisation and globalisation of food to fast food and its link to the global obesity crisis upon adults and specially children'. It addresses a collective issue of multinational corporations encouraging unhealthy fast food to be adopted into the western and eastern worlds and the health and cultural affects of this push onto the children of every society of the respective nations affected. With emphasis on obesity and the target market of children who eventually will accept fast food into their lives as normal food as adults. This review however does not cover the affects of the fast food push and obesity over the food and culture of the different societies. Various newspaper articles and journals have been referred to in order to evaluate and criticize the push of fast food into everyday meal solutions and the affect this has on the obesity rate. The topic of focus will be explored in two sections. Firstly, the evaluation and affects of obesity within the modern society on a global basis with emphasis on the United States of America and Australia will be conducted. Secondly the globalisation and commercialisation of fast/junk food will be addressed. Thirdly, a link will be established between the two through research. The reason this particular

topic was selected was due to the fact that this is an issue that is brought up and forgotten too soon due to the short lived media memory (the effect when an issue is only concentrated upon as long as there is media exposure to it and soon forgotten afterwards) and it should be evaluated as a direct link in more detail. Also due to the reasoning that previously a detailed study for the development of a business plan for Hungry Jacks TM revealed that the obesity was a big link to their product and the general industry under which McDonaldsTM, WendysTM, KFCTM and more are included. Obesity has been evident in the human record for over 20, 000 years and affected numerous aspects of human life and society (Bray, 2007a; Bray, 2007b). This statement by Bray is an eye opener to how long this issue of obesity has existed within the human race and how little attention it has received as opposed to its lifespan so far. Whilst obesity may be caused by many reasons ranging from genetics (less common) to overindulgence in low nutritional value and high fat, salt and sugary foods (as a matter of common knowledge due to awareness campaigns by the media in the western countries over the past years), a top-ranking culprit to this disease/condition is 'Fast Food' or 'Junk Food' Although there is no exact date or to when fast food emerged in society, in October 1885, a fifteen year old boy named Charlie Nagreen came up with the idea to flatten a meatball and place it within two slices of bread to make it convenient for his customers at his local fair to eat and walk around at the same time. From there onwards through decades and decades of development, the 'hamburger' as we recognise it today emerged. (Schlosser & Wilson, 2007). Moving on to current day, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011) the fifth highest mortality rate factor is

obesity and even being overweight. With focus on obesity to begin with, it can be stated that the issue has many a times within the western media and eastern media been addressed to and been recognised on a global scale. Obesity has its claws dug deep into humanity ranging back 20, 000 years (Bray, 2007a; Bray, 2007b); therefore it will not be an overnight task to get rid of this issue from society altogether. The phenomenon has had many years to mature into the problem that it has become in this day and age. While there are many countries at war, poverty and hunger is still prevalent in poor countries, there is a complete different picture of food resources in developed and developing countries. The fast food craze has taken over the world with McDonalds TM alone trading in 119 countries with over 31, 000 restaurants worldwide, employing more than 1. 5 million people. (McDonalds, 2011). With great efficiency, fast food companies have managed to get the message across to children of a young age so the possibility of a psychological and emotional connection being established in the children's minds in regards to the respective brands is highly possible. The growing epidemic of child obesity in many countries is proof that these advertising and marketing campaigns work. An international study has found that an expectant mother's diet during pregnancy can alter her baby's DNA in the womb, increasing its risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes in later life. While this has nothing to do with the amount of body fat on the mother or while on pregnancy and birth, this factor could potentially carry into the child's adulthood (The Age, 2011). This shows that combined with the fact that genetics could contribute to body fat, there is a good chance of children who are prone to being exposed to fast food from an early age to

potentially become overweight or obese in their future. In young children, embedding branding into their subconscious and conscious mind goes a long way. At the same time it can be a powerful tool in influencing the future society. A study on effects of fast food Branding on young children's taste preferences conducted by Thomas N. Robinson and Donna M, Matheson on sixty-three children ranging from 3.5 to 5.5 years of age reveals that the branding of foods and beverages had an influence on the participant's taste perceptions. These findings were consistent with the recommendations to regulate marketing of fast foods to young children and propose that branding may also be a useful strategy to improve a young child's eating behaviour (should it be encouraged in a healthy direction) (Robinson & Donna, 2007). Exposure to advertisements on television which provoke a child's interest via the offer of free toys or just the idea of eating the tasty looking food with their friends is effective enough for the child to request to be taken to that particular place. Advertising to children has an unfavorable effect on food preferences, purchasing behaviour and consumption. (Hastings et al, 2003). It is argued by many that advertisements should be stopped or extremely limited which are aimed towards children who have yet not gained the logical reasoning skills to make better choices. The advertisement lure doesn't just stop at young children but it extends to teens and adults alike, whether it be the offer of a free meal after certain amount of purchases or a discount on a particular night, the idea of a sale and a cheap ready made dinner is alluring enough to reel in the catch for these multinational companies. Doctors throughout the world have been pushing for junk food to stay off the table as long as possible but the doctors in Australia and America

in particular have been suggesting strongly for ad campaigns similar to smoking campaigns to be used to 'gross' out the consumer from indulging in the use of fast food (The Age, 2011). Not just in America or Australia, but also in Asian Pacific region, Europe, Russia, throughout the world the enticement is the same; to provide perceived 'Value' for money. Aiming to satisfy not only the taste buds but also approaching with the psychological strategy to fulfil one's needs using the different levels of/in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Janet, 1987), the attempt is to provide the customers (people) with a sense of belonging and comfort with their food regardless of how high or low on a person's list food belongs. Using an example of two of the most obese and overweight nations in the world, it can be demonstrated how rapidly the epidemic has grown. In America As of 2008, 66% of the population was overweight and 31% American adults were obese. In the same year 32% children were overweight and 17% children between the ages 2 to 19 were obese. (WHO, 2009). The reported figures are not healthy however Australia is no better weighing in at 61% of adults and 25% of children being overweight or obese. (DAA, 2011). In a Nutshell, as suggested by the World Health Organisation, world obesity has double since 1980. That is within a time span of 30. 5 years from 1980 to 2011 (May). Obesity is also linked to be the cause of other health and social problems such as anxiety (The Age, 2011), Diabetes (Hossain et al, 2007). In an experimental movie called 'Supersize Me' directed by Morgan Spurlock in 2003 (released June 2004), Spurlock engages in a 30 day McDonald's diet where all he ate was food from McDonalds, he was not allowed to eat anything that was not on their menu, was allowed to 'supersize' his meal only if asked by the

employees. Before he started the diet, he consulted with three Doctors who would throughout the diet keep a track on changes that his body went through. He was an above average physical character than average Americans, and within five days of commencing the diet, he had gained almost 10 pounds. Eventually he started feeling hungrier even after a big meal, depressed for no specific reason and by the time the experiment had finished, his doctors reported irreversible liver and heart damage. Spurlock even emphasized that the marketing of these products to children before they have a chance to realise of be educated with logic how harmful this type of food is was not acceptable. Also he jokingly added that he would punch his child every time he drove through a fast food chain so none of the brands are successful in enticing welcome feelings in his child's conscious or subconscious mind. (IMDb, 2011). The expansion of fast food to eastern region is having the same affect on the society slowly as it has been in the western world. In order to be accepted outside the western society, fast food chains have had to customise their strategy, food and in some cases names. In order to run successfully many multinational companies have also had enter knowing the risk being rejected from many countries due to cultural, religious or other reasons. Obesity however is also defended by normal people, nutritionists and personal workout gym professionals with the argument that fast food cannot be entirely blamed for the growth of this epidemic. People also resort to diet shakes, meal replacements and metabolic rate increasing pills, which are further harmful for many. It is up to the parents and guardians to educate the child to make better choices so that they are not lured into the incentive of taste alone. Health education

can be a valuable tool in the fight against junk food. Moreover, Michelle Bridges (a famous personal trainer) suggests that feeding a child junk/fast unhealthy food can be seen as a form of child abuse (The Age, 2011). Additionally it is argued that multinational fast food companies are simply creating and providing for demand in the market just like any other business does. Advancing to the issue of commercialisation of normal food to fast food and the globalisation of fast food, splitting the issue further into two sections it can be discussed that firstly normal food is now processed beyond recognition. It is processed to the extent that many fast foods if kept in isolation would not deteriorate for at least six months (Dykes B, 2010). That is the kind of cheap and quick junk food being served to millions of people around the world. It can only be imagined what kind of harmful effects similar type of fast food has on the human body's digestive system. Usually loaded with fats, sugars and salts, fast food has many a times been linked to health issues. The list including obesity, chemically induced cravings for the food, addition of MSG, which is harmful for the body and usually, contains extremely low amounts of nutritional value. Fast food is addictive to many people around the world, simply because it is easy to access, for an individual it is out of daily budget, it tastes extremely good to the taste buds, it serves as comfort food for many people, and it takes the hassle out of doing household chores. The drawbacks of fast food are that due to fast food, many people have suffered damages to their health without even knowing it. Obesity has skyrocketed in the past three decades within America and Australia alone, due to fast food; the traditional family mealtime has also been cut out as the food is quickly consumed. When families spend



less and less time together, this becomes a social problem and if left untreated many people could start feeling lonely, depressed, unsupported and maybe even worthless due to the lack of personal contact with the people close to them. Putting on weight due to not being able to resist the temptation for many girls may result in body image issues and could produce diseases within the body such as bulimia or anorexia (over time). Secondly, fast food going overseas is having the same affect on countries which otherwise would have a culturally balanced diet plan. Many Asian countries' consist of lightly cooked meals such as soups and sushi. The saying 'one bad apple spoils the rest' can be applied to this scenario. The globalisation of fast food considered as being the bad apple and the untouched countries being the clean ones. The push of the same type of tactics working on other nations are already evident with many countries adapting to the concept of ever increasing gyms and fitness courses sold and marketed to overweight/obese or health conscious people. It is a common occurring at schools that obese and overweight children are teased for their body shape. These kind of experienced can make or break a child's self-confidence. Teasing over body fat can be traumatic for many and in extreme cases some children commit suicide to get away from the bullying and depressive behaviour. The rates of obesity in the past 20 years have tripled in developing countries that have been adopting a Western lifestyle. This involves decreased physical activity and overconsumption of cheap, energy packed fast food. These changes are also affect children in those countries. The Middle East, Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and China face the greatest threat (Hosseini et al, 2007) Combining the globalisation and

commercialisation of food and obesity it can be said that fast food has a link to obesity without a doubt. The ever-increasing waistline puts regular people to risk of heart diseases, respiratory, reproductive system, veins, bladder, knee, low immune system and other problems throughout the world (MyDr, 2007). The nutritional value of junk food is little to none; therefore it is even more a worse reason to consume fast food as in the long term; human beings need their bladder, veins, heart and lungs more than junk food. As bad as issue of junk/fast food caused obesity already is it can be considered somewhat unethical for multinational companies to keep pushing and marketing their products to adults and children with intensity. Furthermore the expansion scientifically proved food to cause irreversible damage to the human body (Supersize Me, 2004) to other countries is unethical (In the case of McDonalds™). Not limited to McDonalds, the same is the case for Burger King™, Dominos™, Pizza Hut™, KFCTM, Starbucks™, and many more who knowingly that their products are harmful for consumers on a daily basis still market and advertise them to be adopted into the normal person's life just like ordinary unprocessed foods. Furthermore no warning is given on the consumption of the food on a regular basis. There are healthy choices available at these fast food eateries however they at times pack more or equal value of fat and calories as the unhealthy alternative (Supersize Me, 2004). Turning the focus to the health associations (established for many countries) and the Consumer's International Society (consumer society for the whole wide world), it can be said that efforts are made in order to reduce and stop the problems of obesity and weight related difficulties to arise. A program run by Consumer's International Society ensures that the use of

advertisement around young and growing children is limited. At the current day and age there are more people overweight than there are hungry in the world (Worldwatch Institute, 2000). Through extensive Internet and library research this information has been report has been compiled to draw to attention to the relationship between junk food related obesity and the globalisation of fast food. However health associations of each country should have more funding and support from the government such as the multinational companies do so that there is a fair chance to the consumers to be aware of what they are choosing to put inside their bodies and not just giving into some smart and irresistible advertising and marketing campaign. The commercialisation and globalisation of food to fast food and its link to the global obesity crisis upon adults and specially children has been argued and debated throughout the review using different forms of literature. Having started off with the fact that this literature review would investigate into fast food and its link with obesity in children and adults, the objective has clearly been realized. The realisation begins with the pattern of McDonalds alone being a big enough to branch out over 31, 000 fast food eateries in 119 different countries already. As the world health organisation suggested, obesity ranks in at number 5 for top mortality rate factors. This is proof of the grown and still growing epidemic of the fast food crazy throughout the world. The western cultures having already accepted big food giants' food production to be part of the normal diet and eastern countries following in the trend; it is a combination for an unhealthy future. The link to fast food and obesity is extremely clear with the fact that minimal exercise and maximum fat, salt, sugar and grease intake with little or no nutritional

value results in increased inches for most people around the belly. An emphasis being given to the diet being so important that within the womb a baby's metabolic rate and body starts to adjust to the type of environment it currently (at the time of pregnancy) receives. If the mother's diet is low on carbohydrates of essential nutrients, it can be possible that a baby's body system sets to saving fat once it is out of the womb. Children are at a greater risk as from the day they are born, they are bombarded with advertisements and cartoons to convince their conscious and subconscious mind to accept the fast/junk food as a natural food source. Many companies having understood Maslow's hierarchy of needs target the basic necessity with strong ads and marketing. Many times it works and sometimes it might not. By creating a sense of belonging, a business can ensure customers for itself 20 years down the track. The food sold at the junk food outlets is processed and extremely unnatural to eat. This is a major contributor to obesity and the epidemic. However this practice is defended by many of the public arguing that it is the parents' responsibility to make sure they educate their child and watch what they eat. A criticism of fast food is that due to the purchase of fast food, which is easily consumed quickly, there is no time left to spend with the family at dinnertime if the family is busy (which can develop into loneliness, depression or mental issues). As a result of the ever-growing numbers, new gyms and fitness centres are open for business. Not just that but many diet pills and shakes are also in business due to this reason. In conclusion it can be said that the affect of fast food is obesity upon any nation or group of people, later resulting in countless health problems. Therefore it is best that multinational companies either improve

their quality of food or people stop consuming foods which may be potentially deadly in the long run. Reference list Ashton D (2004). Food advertising and childhood obesity. 'A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence' David Hume. 97 No . 2, pp. 51-52. Biro F, Wien M (2010). Childhood obesity and adult morbidities. Childhood obesity and adult morbidities. 19, No . 5, pp. 1-4. Dieticians Association of Australia (2011). Australian health facts [online]. [Accessed 23 May 2011]. Available from: . Dykes B McDonald's Happy Meal resists decomposition for six months. (2010). Yahoo News, 12 October, Available from: < [http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog\\_upshot/20101012/bs\\_yblog\\_upshot/mcdonalds-happy-meal-resists-decomposition-for-six-months](http://news.yahoo.com/s/yblog_upshot/20101012/bs_yblog_upshot/mcdonalds-happy-meal-resists-decomposition-for-six-months)> Eric Schlosser, Charles Wilson (eds). (2007). Chew on this. United States of America: Houghton Mifflin Company. Gareth W and Gema F (2009). Obesity: Science to Practice. N/A: John Wiley & Sons. Hastings G, Stead M, McDermott L, et al. Review of Research on the Effects of Food Promotion to Children. Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Centre for Social Medicine, 2003. [www. foodstandards. gov. uk/healthiereating/promotion/readreview] IMDb [online]. (2004). [Accessed 21 May 2011]. Available from: . Is junk food child abuse? [online]. (2011). [Accessed 22 May 2011]. Available from: . Janet A. Simons, Donald B. Irwin and Beverly A. Drinnien (1987). MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS. New York: West Publishing Company. Key Information [online]. (2011). [Accessed 21 May 2011]. Available from: . Kiyah J Duffey, Penny Gordon-Larsen, David R Jacobs, Jr, O Dale Williams and Barry M Popkin (2007). Original Research Communicaton. Differential associations of fast food and restaurant food consumption with 3-y change in

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