

Life in the drive-thru lane: a look at the impact of fast food on america

[Nutrition](#), [Fast Food](#)



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Weight gain, high cholesterol, vomiting, headaches, depression, and vanished sex drive; these are the effects of eating nothing but McDonald's for a month. That is exactly what happened to Morgan Spurlock, a filmmaker who ate McDonald's for three meals a day, every day, for a month for his documentary on the harmful effects of fast food on the body called "Supersize Me." No one expected the amount of harm McDonald's would have on his body. By exposing the evils about fast food, the truth is finally shown. So much of what we eat we know nothing about. Fast food restaurants are becoming a negative influence on our lives socially, economically, and physically (Usbourne). People should become more informed about this issue and find solutions to the problem that will prevent the negative effects from happening. The growing number of fast food restaurants contributes to its effect on our lives socially. Fast food can be found everywhere. There are roughly 200, 000 fast food restaurants in the United States alone (Schlosser 264). With 30, 000 restaurants worldwide, the McDonald's Corporation owns the most retail property in the world (Schlosser 4). It is almost impossible to avoid seeing a fast food restaurant, which is why most people eat it so often. Not only is fast food affecting America, it is also affecting the rest of the world. "Fast food has joined Hollywood movies, blue jeans, and pop music as one of America's most prominent cultural exports" (Schlosser 10). In foreign countries, companies adapt their food to local tastes (Hatfield). McDonald's has about 17, 000 restaurants outside the United States in more than 120 foreign countries (Schlosser 229). They open about five new restaurants every day, and typically four of them are overseas (Schlosser 229). With the

growing number of restaurants, McDonald's is becoming more and more recognized. They are the most widely recognized brand and spend the most money on advertising. They own more playgrounds and give out more toys than any other company. They also have a popular clothing line. In a recent survey of schoolchildren 96% could identify Ronald McDonald, second only to Santa Claus (Schlosser 4). In a survey in five different countries, the Golden Arches were more widely recognized than the Christian cross (Schlosser 5). The impact fast food has had on people's lives is astounding. People have begun relying on it. Three out of ten customers say that eating a fast food meal is essential to the way they live (Paeratuakul). Most fast food visits are unplanned. More than 70% are impulsive decisions (Schlosser 66).

Adolescents eat fast food about twice per week (Paeratakul). One-quarter of the adult population can be found at a fast food restaurant on any given day (Schlosser 3). With so many people eating out at fast food restaurants this leaves many families to lose the traditional family dinner time. It is sad when families have become so busy with their lives that they can not find time to sit down and have a meal together. The past few years I lived at home my mom was too busy to cook so I ate more fast food than I should have. It is so easy to just grab a meal at a fast food restaurant and forget about eating with your family. This is causing families to grow apart even further. A good idea would be to set aside time to actually eat as a family. Along with the impact on society comes an impact on our economy. Americans use the majority of their food money to buy processed food (Schlosser 120). About half the money used to buy food is used at restaurants typically fast food restaurants (Schlosser 4). Americans spend \$110 billion annually on fast

food. Americans spend a lot of money in order to enjoy a fast food meal. " They spend more of fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music- combined" (Schlosser 3). The fast food industry itself spends money, including money that benefits other industries. Food companies are constantly trying to get consumers to eat more of their product (Hellmich). Every year fast food chains spend \$3 billion on television advertising (Schlosser 47). McDonald's has replaced Coca-cola as the world's most famous brand because they spend more money on advertising than any other brand (Schlosser 4). In addition to spending money on advertising. McDonald's purchases products from other industries. " McDonald's is the nations largest purchaser of beef, pork, potatoes - and the second largest purchaser of chicken" (Schlosser 4). McDonald's also has an effect on employment. About 90% of the country's new jobs are through McDonald's. " An estimated one out of every eight workers in the United States has at some point been employed by McDonald's" (Schlosser 4). McDonald's hires more people than any other organization. McDonald's approximately hires one million people each year (Schlosser 4). The large amount of new employees is due to the turnover rate of about 150 percent (Schlosser 294). Perhaps the most shocking effect that fast food has on our lives is the effect that it has on us physically. Many people are concerned about the nutritional quality of fast food (Paeratakul). People tend to eat more calories than the body needs when eating the very energy dense meals at food restaurant (BBC News " Why"). Most fast food is high in fat and energy. Although fast food restaurants have expanded their menu to include more choices, a large hamburger, with 600 calories and 35 grams of fat, and

a small French fry, with 200 calories and 10 grams of fat, are highest in terms of sales volume (Paeratakul). The lack of nutrition and excess of fat in fast foods leads to obesity. The United States has the highest obesity rate in the world. America is becoming a very obese country. The obesity rate has doubled since the early 1960s due to the way Americans eat and live (Schlosser 240). The very energy dense foods we consume make Americans obese (BBC News " Why"). Obesity leads to other problems such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and high blood pressure among others (Hellmich). All the obesity related illnesses costs the United States money through medicare. The cost of obesity is twice as large as the amount of money that the fast food industries make (Schlosser 261). " The obesity epidemic that began in the United States during the late 1970s is now spreading to the rest of the world, with fast food as one of its vectors" (Schlosser 242). Foreign consumers are beginning to look more and more like Americans in size due to the spread of fast food. As the number of fast food restaurants doubled in Great Britain, so did the obesity rate among adults. A similar occurrence is happening in Japan as hamburgers and French fries are replacing their once healthy diet of rice, fish, and vegetables (Schlosser 242). It seems as though wherever fast food chains go, obesity soon follows. It seems as though Americans need fast food. According to a new study, people might actually become addicted to fast food. If fast food is eaten enough, the brain will stop producing the hormones that tell you when you are full (Prewitt). The fast food industry wants people to keep eating when they are full by offering bigger portion sizes (Hellmich). " For a large number of people a steady diet of fast food is almost as harmful and as

difficult to resist as heroin is to an addict or nicotine to a habitual cigarette smoker" (Prewitt). Withdrawal symptoms can occur if taken off a diet of fast food (BBC News "Fast"). Fast food cannot be completely to blame for America's problems such as obesity, but it is a large contributor. The experiment done by Morgan Spurlock proves just how harmful fast food can be to one's body. He gained almost 25 pounds and suffered numerous health problems. When he ordered his meals, he was not expecting headaches and depression too. He did not conduct this experiment to attack McDonald's, but to educate people on what they put into their bodies on a daily basis (Usbourne). It seems obvious on how to prevent these problems from occurring in our lives. Simply stop eating fast food and this will prevent the fast food industry from causing these problems. Unfortunately it is not that easy. " Hundreds of millions of people buy fast food every day without giving it much thought, unaware of the subtle and not so subtle ramifications of their purchases." (Schlosser). The best way to help stop this is to educate people on what they are eating and where it comes from. For some people this may not even be enough. Quick cheap meals while you are on the go seem very enticing to busy families or college students. Grocery stores offer many quick meals that are much healthier and cheaper in the long run. Also if you do need to eat fast food, many restaurants offer a more healthy alternative. Choosing smaller portions will also help cut down on the fat. Due to the recent public interest in fast food causing obesity, McDonald's has eliminated the supersize option. With the public's attention to our health, the fast food industry will have to continue to make changes to satisfy customers. When it comes to being a college student, you cannot always

make the best decisions when it comes to eating healthy. It is pretty easy to eat healthy at the dining halls if you wanted to. Purdue does an excellent job of offering alternatives. However, not everyone on campus eats at the dining halls. Many live in apartments where they prepare their own food. Eating out can be pretty costly if you are in this situation. Buying quick and easy meals to make at home is the best solution to this problem. This all takes an effort on the students part in order to make this work. Advertising is a major way of bringing in customers. " Congress should immediately ban all advertisements aimed at children that promotes foods high in fat and sugar" (Schlosser). Commercials appeal to the kids, which make the kids want the food, which causes the parents to take them there. This would encourage the fast food companies to alter their recipes for the children's menus. Fast food is widely recognized and people have begun to rely on it. Americans spend large amounts of money in order to eat a fast food meal. It can be addictive, yet offers little nutritional value and leads to obesity. After Morgan Spurlock's experience we should all rethink the kind of food we are putting into our body. Fast food restaurants cause a negative influence on our lives socially, economically, and physically. Works Cited BBC News. " Fast Food as Addictive as Heroin." 30 Jan 2003. BBC News. 4 Mar. 2004 BBC News. " Why Fast food Makes You Get Fat." 22 Oct. 2003. BBC News. 4 Mar. 2004 Hatfield, Alcinda and Jack Marr. " Fast-food Restaurants - Just what Eastern China's Consumers Ordered." AgExporter. July 1997. Hellmich, Nanci. " Food for Thought for a Fat Nation - Does Food Industry Exert Undue Influence Over Our Willpower." USA Today. 19 Feb. 2002. Paeratakul, Sahasorn., et al. " Fast-food consumption among US adults and children: dietary and nutrient

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