

Free essay on regulating the fast food industry

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Introduction

Obesity and food related poor health have been public health issues in the U. S. for more than fifty years and are now prevalent in all parts of the world.

The rates of diabetes, which are almost all related to food, obesity and inactivity, have been estimated to increase by 37% in the U. S, 134% in India and 76% in China (Yach, Stuckler, and Brownell, 2006). As a result of the proven link between poor dietary habits and disease, the public, policymakers and health professionals have openly challenged fast food industry practices. Although obesity and poor diet are caused by many factors, food industry practices like marketing unhealthy foods to young people, promoting in-between-meal snacks and misusing schools for commercial benefit has raised the clamoring for government regulation. In addition, it has led to stipulation of the calorie labeling practices in restaurants. This paper presents the argument to support the stand that the fast food industry should be regulated in a manner similar to the tobacco industry.

The first reason why the food industry should be regulated is because some of the foods sold in restaurants and fast-food places are addictive. Fast food

companies have taken advantage of this fact for their financial gain.

According to Pomeranz, Teret, Sugarman, Rutkow and Brownell (2009), some sugary foods are addictive. Researchers have used animals in tests which are based on drug studies to examine likely addictive properties of food and sugar. Avena, Rada & Hoebel (2008) concluded that rats which are intermittently exposed to a sugar solution behave similarly to rats which administer addictive drugs voluntarily. This serves as evidence that sugar can be addictive. Brain imaging evidence also suggests that obese people respond to food differently as compared to non-obese people. This evidence is consistent with observations that some fast foods are addictive and may result in cravings which eventually leads to binge eating and obesity. The addictive nature of sugar may also result in serious diseases and health conditions such as diabetes. The fast food industry should, therefore, be regulated to protect the free will, personal freedom, and rational judgment of consumers from manipulation by food businesses.

Secondly, sugar- and corn-based fast foods are proven to be contributors to poor health. Eating fast foods regularly can result in a variety of health problems such as obesity and diabetes. Obesity is the medical condition where excess body fat accumulates to an extent that it negatively affects one's health. Sweetened fast foods and sugar-loaded drinks cause a quick rush of sugars to the body. Over time, these can act as risk factors for diabetes by causing inflammation and insulin resistance. The production processes used in the creation of fast foods result in a lot of greasy and fatty content in them. Fast foods, also known as junk food are rich in calories, which create empty energy. This energy and fat accumulate as excess body

fat. When this body fat is deposited around major blood vessels, it leads to increased work for the heart and may cause cardiac arrest. Most fast foods are prepared quickly and fail to cook properly. Junk food is also usually salty and spicy to an extent that it may directly cause high blood pressure levels and hypertension. When junk food is being prepared, it may come into contact with contaminated surfaces and even manure. This may lead to contamination with *E. coli* and salmonella, which are responsible for the worst kind of food poisoning. Antibiotics are usually used to eliminate the bacteria but there exists some toxins that may cause serious health complications.

The third reason why the fast food industry should be regulated is because of advertising of potentially harmful products to children. Many companies in the fast food industry are targeting children between the ages of 2 and 18 years with their adverts. According to Melnick (2010), a research focusing on the promotional practices of Wendy's, McDonalds, KFC, Subway, Dairy Queen, Taco Bell, Domino's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks made findings that 40% of parents had their children asking for the advertised products. These adverts lead to fast food becoming commonplace for many families. One-third of teens and children have been reported to consume junk food once or more per week. There is 16 to 17% intake of calories from fast foods whereby teens order between 800 to 1100 calories per meal. 30% of these calories come from saturated sugar or fat. This is more than half of what is recommended for the entire day. The advertising practices of leading fast food companies is so rampant that health agencies have sought to take measures to protect children from

advertises of unhealthy foods. Today, some companies even put toys in meals as a marketing strategy aimed at attracting sales to children. Other strategies include making attractive packaging to improve the children's affinity to their brand at an early age. Shifting public attitude to this kind of advertising and taking legislative action can help discourage it.

The fourth reason why regulation is necessary is that some of the packaging used for fast foods as grease-proof wrapping is harmful to one's health.

Food-contact packaging using paper exposes humans to polyfluoroalkyl phosphate esters (PAPs) and Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) when PAPs migrate from the paper packaging to the food (D'eon & Mabury, 2010).

These chemicals are linked to many health effects. PFOA is linked to testicular and kidney cancer in humans. Health agencies have cited the existence of PAPs and PFOAs in human blood and have gathered evidence which suggests that one of the leading contributors to this is food packaging material. The health effects of some of the chemical preservatives and food colors used in fast foods remain largely unknown. These chemical preservatives could be harmful to humans because they are not utilized in a controlled manner. In addition to the potential health effects of wrappers used by fast food companies is environmental pollution. When plastic wrappers are disposed in the wrong way or burnt, they pollute the environment through production of greenhouse gases and interfering with animal habitats. It is, therefore, important for manufacturers to conduct thorough and transparent safety analyses of packaging material. Until this has taken place, there should be a regulation of the use of this material in the packaging of food in the fast food industry.

The fifth reason why regulatory measures should be taken on the fast food industry is that it has led to the erosion of family values and hampered the social and emotional development of children. Today, family members in the United States spend a lesser amount of time than they did half a century ago. One of the reasons why this has happened is because family members rarely spend time together on the dinner table to eat a home-prepared meal. The increasing popularity of fast foods has the main contributor to this. Members of a family which spends shorter durations of time together are less likely to get along with each other as compared to a family which spends more time together. Children are likely to have poor social and emotional development if they do not spend enough time with their parents.

Conclusion

There have been major concerns regarding the links between consumption of fast foods (also known as junk food) with health problems and diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. Although obesity and poor diet may be caused by many factors, food industry practices such as marketing unhealthy foods to young people, promoting in-between-meal snacks and misusing schools for commercial benefit has raised the call for government regulation. There are five major reasons why the fast-food industry should be regulated. The first reason is that some of the foods sold in restaurants and fast-food places are addictive. This increases the chances of harmful health effects. Secondly, sugar- and corn-based fast foods are proven to be contributors to poor health. Thirdly, fast food companies advertise potentially harmful products to children. The fourth reason is that some of the packaging used for fast foods as grease-proof wrapping is harmful to one's

health. Fifth, is that fast foods have led to the erosion of family values and hampered the social and emotional development of children. These five reasons indicate that fast foods are not only unhealthy but are also linked with a variety of negative effects. The fast food industry should, therefore, be regulated in a manner aimed at protecting the consumer.

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