

# Fast food and the related dangers

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



Research Center in Hawaii, M. Basil, is with the Department of Mass Communications at the University of Denver, E. Maibach, and D. Snyder, are with Porter/Novelli in Washington, DC. and J. Goldberg, is with the School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. The article Why Americans eat what they do: taste, nutrition, cost, convenience, and weight control concerns as influences on food consumption discusses research that was completed about the influences on consumer food choices. The study found that “ demographic factors were significant predictors of the importance of taste, nutrition, cost, convenience, and weight control for consumers” (Glanz, et al 1998). Taste is high on the list when it comes to determining what people are choosing to eat. What is it that makes fast food taste so good?

Across the U. S many Americans are drawn into eating fast food. Consumers know that when they indulge in fast food it is going to taste good and they will be satisfied. Food additives play a role in what makes our fast food taste good. Food additives can be complex and hard to understand. According to the Medical Dictionary, food additives can be defined as:

“ A substance added to food to maintain or impart a certain consistency, to improve or maintain nutritive value, to enhance palatability or flavor, to produce a light texture, or to control pH. Food additives are used to help bread rise during baking, to keep bread mold-free, to color margarine, to prevent discoloration of some fruits, and to prevent fats and oils from becoming rancid. The FDA regulates their use” (Medical Dictionary, 2009).

Additives are used in manufacturing “ their key end-users are food manufactures, and the chief application segments of food additives are fast

food, packages food, and beverages” (PRNewswire, 2009). Consumers will find additives in foods that are processed and have a shelf life. With consumers enjoying the taste of fast food we wonder if it is possible to become addicted to fast food.

Convenience, cost, and taste are all reasons that people are choosing to eat fast food. With the fast food crave bigger than ever the concern of becoming addicted arises. Kris Gunnars a nutrition researcher, states “ food addiction is, quite simply, being addicted to junk food in the same way as drug addicts are addicted to drugs. Processed junk foods have a powerful effect on the “ reward” centers in the brain, involving brain neurotransmitters like dopamine” (Gunnars, 2017). According to Gunnars, symptoms of food addiction may include, “ frequently getting cravings for certain foods, eating more than intended, eating to the point of feeling stuffed, feeling guilty after eating, make excuses about something you crave, tried setting rules about certain food, hide consumption of unhealthy food from others, and unable to control consumption of unhealthy foods” (Gunnars, 2017). With fast food consumption on the rise and fast food having some addictive qualities a consumer should be concerned with what the effects of fast food can be.

The effects of fast food have been researched for years and many studies have been completed. Obesity can be an effect of consuming fast food. According to the World Health Organization, obesity can be defined as “ abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health and has a BMI greater than or equal to 30. Body mass index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity

in adults” (February, 2018). Obesity among adults has been on the rise for the last thirty years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015), “ More than one-third (34. 9% or 78. 6 million) of U. S. adults are obese.” The link between fast food and obesity is apparent when you look at fast food being, highly processed, full of fat and calories, added sugars, and high amounts of sodium. Obesity is not only affecting adults, but childhood obesity is also becoming a problem in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (June, 2015), “ 17% and affects about 12. 7 million children and adolescents for the past decade.” Larger portion sizes, lead to a higher calorie intake. Calorie intake; associated with a higher body mass index, can lead to obesity. According to the National Center of Health Statistics (2013), “ Obesity is among one of the most concerning health risks and “ frequent fast-food consumption has been shown to contribute to weight gain”. “ Eating fast foods has been linked to a number of different health conditions... It is important for people to be aware of the risks of illness and disease related to the consistent consumption of fast foods” (Weiss 2016).

Obesity can lead to other potential health risks, such as

- a. Diabetes – the connection between obesity and diabetes is between fat accumulation and insulin resistance.
- b. Cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke- obesity can raise blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels, lower your “ good” HDL cholesterol level, increase blood pressure, increased blood pressure leads to stroke.

c. Gall stones- gall stones are deposits of cholesterol. When cholesterol levels are high gall stones then form.

d. Cancer- According to the National Cancer Institute (2017), “ there is consistent evidence that higher amounts of body fat are associated with increased risks of a number of cancers including:

1. Endometrial cancer
2. Esophageal adenocarcinoma
3. Gastric cardia cancer
4. Liver cancer
5. Kidney cancer
6. Multiple myeloma
7. Meningioma
8. Pancreatic cancer
9. Colorectal cancer
10. Gallbladder cancer
11. Breast Cancer
12. Ovarian cancer
13. Thyroid cancer”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that “ Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women... Coronary heart disease is the most common type of heart disease (CDC, 2016). A healthy diet is an important piece, to a healthy lifestyle, and can be important in preventing some health problems. These health risks are not only occurring among adults, but are affecting children, as well.

In today's society there is a need for fast food to be inexpensive, convenient, and nutritious. The fast food industry has got the cost at a level consumer don't mind paying and with the normal drive thru wait time just over a minute the convenience is there too. Healthier options are a different story. Even though some strides have been made to offer healthier options there is still room for improvement. Consumers are becoming educated about what they are putting in their bodies, and are aware that most menu items at fast food restaurants offer minimal nutritional value. According to Barbra Bronson Gray, award-winning writer and nationally recognized health expert, " just because there are more items that seem healthy on fast food menus these days, it doesn't mean that the restaurants' offerings are actually any better for their customers" (Bronson, 2015). According to Author Andrea walker, " Wendy's Baja Salad contains 1, 990 milligrams of sodium, McDonald's Fruit & Maple oatmeal contains more sugar than a snickers bar, and Subways subs when adding cheese and mayo can jump to 24 grams of fat" (Walker, 2011). Consumers need to be aware of the nutritional value of the food that they are eating. There are some ways to avoid the foods that offer a low nutritional value when ordering fast food.

When fast food is consumed occasionally consumers could look for menu items that have a higher nutritional value. Author Laura Williams, says the " trick to ordering wisely is to watch your portion sizes, avoid trans fats and excessive saturated fat, and try to come away with some sort of nutritional value in the form of high-quality protein, fiber, or vitamins and minerals" (Williams, 2017). When consumers are aware of the nutritional value of the

food they are consuming better choices can be made. Some professionals would even say that fast food could be consumed occasionally.

Medical professionals claim fast food can be consumed occasionally when a healthy diet is being followed. According to David Katz M. D., M. P. H, the Director and Co-Founder at Yale Prevention Research Center, “ it’s okay to eat at a fast food restaurant, occasionally – once a week would certainly be occasionally. In particular, if you take advantage of the many healthier options now available at most fast food restaurants” (Katz, 2018). When consumers limit fast food consumption to occasionally the odds of it ever effecting their health will decrease. We all know that fast food is inexpensive and convenient but is it worth sacrificing good nutrition and the energy that is needed to fuel a person’s body.

Despite fast food being inexpensive and convenient people should limit their intake due to obesity and health risks. Consumers know that fast food is high in calories, trans fats, and sodium. Meals that are frequently consumed that are high in calories, trans fats, and sodium lead to obesity. Obesity is the underlying condition to many more health risks. According to the CDC, 2013, “ obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer, some of the leading causes of preventable death” (CDC, 2018). Occasional food consumption will not harm a consumer but frequent visits to fast food establishments could lead to obesity and other health risks.

Across the U. S there are almost 200, 000 fast food establishments making fast food easily accessible and convenient for many Americans. When

convenience is paired with low cost it is just what every consumer is looking for. The fast food industry is working on creating menu items that more nutritional but they still have work to do in order to serve meals that have any nutritional value. With the growing popularity of fast food consumers need to be aware of the risks associated with indulging in fast food.

Increasing obesity rates in America are on the rise and have been associated with the consumption of fast food. There are also many health risks that have obesity as the underlying cause that people should be aware of. With the risk of obesity and health risks people should limit their fast food intake.