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Does the fast food industry play a role in the destruction of world health?

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Quick Service Restaurants (QSR), more commonly known as the fast food industry, is giving a whole new name to the words “fast food”. United States based fast food companies are now franchised in over one hundred countries (Franchise Help, 2015). As of 2013 the well-known company McDonalds had 34,480 restaurants in 119 different countries (Naudziunas, 2013). Since the fast food industry is growing at a rate faster than it ever has before, it raises the question about how consuming this food is affecting world health. Through research of this topic I have discovered a broad range of ideas pertaining to the fast food industry and its effect on human health. Fast food plays a role in the destruction of world health as it causes health problems, creates cultural changes to society, and it also introduces unnatural elements (toxic chemicals) to our food sources. However, fast food industries have healthy alternatives and, if eaten in moderation, will not cause damage to an individual’s health.

Consuming fast food can cause life- threatening health problems. Research shown by Dr. Dian and Tom Griesel, business and health spokes people for TurboCharged supports this claim. The study, done by the University of Minnesota, looked at 52,000 Chinese residents in Singapore over sixteen years (Griesel, 2012). The results showed that the risk of dying from coronary heart disease went up by twenty percent in people who consumed fast food once a week (Griesel, 2012). The risk increases the more an individual eats fast food. Eating fast food two to three times a week increases the risk by fifty percent and when eaten four or more times a week the risk increases by eighty percent (Griesel, 2012). A study, shown in writing by Matthew Lee, a lifestyle researcher with a degree in psychology furthers this research. This study from the “Canadian Journal of Public Health” shows that regions with larger concentrations of fast food restaurants are 2.62 times more likely to have high levels of hospitalization due to heart problems (Lee, 2014). Another study done by the University of South Australia showed that, “for each 10 percent increase in the density of fast food restaurants in a region, people are 1.39 times more likely to die from a cardiovascular condition” (Lee, 2014). Even after ruling out death caused by cardiovascular conditions, fast food is still associated with an increased risk of death (Lee, 2014). The same Canadian study as previously mentioned showed that regions with many fast food restaurants are 2.52 times more likely to have higher rates of all-cause mortality (Lee, 2014). The Australian study also previously mentioned supports this with showing that each 10 percent increase in the amount of fast food restaurants, the region becomes connected with a 1.36 times greater risk to all-cause mortality (Lee, 2014). These incredibly horrific health effects can be reduced with the elimination of fast food from an individuals diet.

Obesity is also a major health concern caused by consuming fast food. Research done by Tiisetso Motsoeneng, a writer for Reuters, a London based international news agency, shows that in South Africa nearly three quarters of the population are overweight (Motsoeneng, 2014). The country ranks third in most obese nations, only behind the United States and Mexico (Motsoeneng, 2014). This is presumed to be because of the amount of fast food consumed on a daily basis.

At lunchtime outside South Africa's biggest shopping mall, hungry workmen in hard hats pour out of a building site to buy cheap loaves of bread and jumbo bottles of fizzy drinks. They are joined by middle-class office workers, forming long queues at fast-food restaurants to stack trays with fried chicken, pizza or local delicacies such as bunny chow -- a hollowed out loaf of bread stuffed with steaming curry (Motsoeneng, 2014).

This quote helps us to understand the extent that the fast food industry is having on African populations, showing the main cause of obesity is closely connected with the consumption of fast food. Furthermore, a study by the London-based Overseas Development Institute found that the number of overweight individuals in developing countries alone has tripled in only three decades, from 250 million to 1 billion in 2008 (Motsoeneng, 2014). These shocking statistics have shown that the consumption of fast food is causing a drastic increase in obesity rates on a world wide scale.

Additionally, fast food creates many cultural changes to society. Research done by Christina Pirello, a promoter of healthy eating and host of the television series *Christina Cooks*, shows that United States' government surveys from the years 1977-1978, 1989-1991, and 1994-1996 revealed that more Americans were eating their meals from fast food restaurants compared to home cooked meals (Pirello, 2012). These surveys also showed that among 19-39 year olds, the amount of food consumed from restaurants and fast food has more than doubled since the 1970's (Pirello, 2012). Additionally, these surveys revealed that over a quarter of all Americans eat at a fast food restaurant every day (Pirello, 2012). A quote from *Fast Food Nation*, a book written by Eric Schlosser, an investigative journalist giving his one-sided account of the fast food industry, states,

Americans now spend more money on fast food than on higher education, personal computers, computer software, or new cars. They spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music - combined (Schlosser, 2000).

The growth of the fast food industry can be credited to many cultural changes occurring throughout the world. By the year 1975 about a third of American mothers with young children worked outside the home- today close to two thirds of mothers do the same (Schlosser, 2000). Due to many mothers working, there has been an increased demand in the types of services that mother used to provide (cooking, cleaning, childcare etc.) (Schlosser, 2000). This causes an increase in the amount of fast food consumed by families as mothers need an easy and convenient way to feed their children.

A generation ago, three-quarters of the money used to buy food in the United States was spent to prepare meals at home. Today about half of the money used to buy food is spent at restaurants - mainly at fast food restaurants. (Schlosser, 2000).

The same type of thing is happening in France where many of the French have become relaxed about their "notoriously rigid food culture rules" (Guttman, 2013). In France's culture, meals never used to be eaten alone, but as the fast food industry continues to rise, many French see fast food as a freedom from their previously incredibly inflexible food culture (Guttman, 2013). Fast food is rapidly altering the way people consume their foods, causing countless cultural changes to society.

Fast food also introduces unnatural elements into food. Research done by Nadia Haris, a radiation therapist who focuses mainly on the needs of oncology patients, shows that many foods contain things called Nitrite Salts (Haris, 2015). Nitrite Salts are preservatives to help fast foods keep their fresh taste, smell and color (Haris, 2015). These preservatives have been linked with stomach cancers and cancers in the digestive tract (Haris, 2015). Additionally many fast food drinks contain Saccharin, an artificial sweetener which has shown to increase the risk of bladder cancer, ovarian cancer, uterine cancer, blood cancer, and skin cancer (Haris, 2015). Many foods contain food coloring to make foods appear more appetizing (Haris, 2015). These chemicals have shown to be by products of coal, tar and many chemicals that increase the risk of cancer (Haris, 2015). Furthermore, research by Heather Neal, a sports dietitian

who shares her work through a Disney sponsored blog, shows that only fifty percent of a chicken McNugget from McDonalds is actually chicken (Neal, 2014). The other fifty percent contains corn derivatives, sugars, leavening agents and other fully synthetic ingredients (Neal, 2014). A study in *Annals of Diagnostic Pathology* showed that the amount of pure meat in fast food hamburgers may be as little as two percent (Neal, 2014). Another study by Anthony Gucciardi, founder of NaturalSociety, one of the largest natural health websites in the world, shows that McDonald's McRib contains GMOs, deadly chemicals, harmful compounds, and most importantly azodicarbonamide- an ingredient that has been banned in Australia, Europe, and Singapore (Gucciardi, 2013). Azodicarbonamide is a chemical used in creating foam plastics, such as in the creation of yoga mats (Gucciardi, 2013). This chemical is only one of over seventy ingredients that make up a McRib sandwich (Gucciardi, 2013). Fast food restaurants taking the liberty to add numerous hazardous chemicals to the foods people are consuming on a daily basis. The addition of these chemicals is causing harmful health problems to many populations throughout the world.

Although fast food is detrimental to your health, many fast food restaurants have healthy alternatives. McDonalds Classic Grilled Chicken Sandwich contains only 350 calories with 9 grams of fat, 42 grams of carbs, and 28 grams of protein, a seemingly healthy alternative (Editorial Staff, 2013). This sandwich can be found in McDonald's all over the world. Additionally, some up-and-coming fast food joints, such as Fast N Fresh, take pride in making fresh food at a quick speed. A quote from owners of Fast N Fresh, Lesley and Michael Harb, states that, "Our ingredients are prepared daily with the freshest, highest-quality, locally-sourced (when possible) ingredients" (FastNFresh, 2015). Smell The Bread, an organic fast food restaurant, also takes on this same philosophy with a mission statement "To inspire healthy compassionate lifestyles by providing our customers with the freshest quality natural products produced in an ecologically responsible way" (Smell The Bread, 2015). Chipotle, a gourmet burrito and taco restaurant, also has healthy alternatives such as the Chipotle salad with barbacoa, black beans, and fresh tomato salsa. This salad is 320 calories with eight grams of fat and 33 grams of protein (The Daily Meal, 2013). Many places in the United Kingdom also offer healthy and quick food such as Busaba Eathai, Casse Croute, Food for Thought, Hummus Bros and countless other restaurants dedicated to healthy eating (The Guardian, 2006). This research shows that not all fast food restaurants are unhealthy, and most have healthier substitutions for conventional fast food meals.

When eaten in moderation, fast food does not necessarily have negative health effects. A teacher in Iowa allowed his students to plan a menu of food for him in order to lose weight by only eating McDonalds (ABC News, 2014). The teacher wanted to show that eating McDonalds can actually be good for you in moderation. He also wanted to show how the movie *Supersize Me* was inaccurate in the sense that there are healthier alternatives when consuming fast foods (ABC News, 2014). He did 45 minutes of walking a few days a week on top of only eating McDonalds foods. He lost 37 pounds and lowered his cholesterol by 32 percent after 90 days (ABC News, 2014). He planned out his meals in advance with the help of his students. He says that you need to be aware of what you are eating and how much you are consuming. As quoted from one of his students, "It's not McDonalds that is making us fat is how much we consume and what we consume" (ABC News, 2014). When food is eaten in moderation, the dangerous health effects caused by consuming fast food decrease, showing that moderation may be the key to healthy eating.

Through research on this topic, I have come to realize how detrimental food from fast food restaurants can be to your health and well-being. Everyday people are consuming food containing terrible

chemicals and additives that are destroying their health and causing tremendous weight gain and diseases. Most people are unaware of what they are consuming causing them to continue to eat these awful foods. My research enlightened me by showing that there are numerous healthy and organic fast food restaurants right in my own city. These restaurants take pride in being fresh and natural, proving to me that not all fast food restaurants are awful for your health. I also understand that many mainstream fast food restaurants offer healthier alternatives, and when eaten in moderation will not cause life-threatening health risks. I previously believed that there were minimal health effects to consuming fast food. After researching this topic I discovered that there are more health problems associated with fast food than I could ever fathom. This information has changed the way I view and consume fast food, making me a more knowledgeable consumer. Overall, I still believe that the fast food industry plays an immense role in the destruction of world health. In the future, I feel that we need to make consumers aware of the harmful foods and chemicals that they are eating on a daily basis and educate them on alternative, fresh, fast food restaurants. Fast food plays a role in the destruction of world health as it causes health problems, creates cultural changes to society, and it also introduces unnatural elements to our food sources (toxic chemicals). However, fast food industries do have healthy alternatives and if eaten in moderation will not cause damage to an individual's health.

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