

Fast Food

1. The development of fast food is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before World War II (1940-1945), there were very few fast food chains, but in the second half of the twentieth century, they sprung up everywhere. Fast food became popular because it suited the new life-style that was developing in that period. Since women were going out to work and had less time to cook, they needed food that could be prepared quickly and relied upon for taste. As the pace of life increased, so did the fast food industry. As a result, fast food has become the main food product in the western world today.
2. But while fast food is cheap on the pocket, it is expensive on one's health. One direct result of fast food is obesity. In his book *Fatland* (2003), Greg Critser claims, “overweight will kill far more Americans each year than any terrorist would dare dream of taking out.” Always in the forefront, McDonald's led the way towards this obesity epidemic. In 1960, a serving of its French fries contained 200 calories; by the late 1990s, the portions were larger and had 540 calories . Critser also explains how nature has designed us to eat as much food as we can when it is around. This view is supported by health professionals who say that most people cannot resist the food on their plate, even if they are totally full.
3. The popularity of fast food has created an obesity epidemic which resulted in a legal rather than a medical response. In 2002, two teenage girls from New York sued McDonald's, claiming that the fast food chain was responsible for their weight problems. McDonald's was chosen since it was the largest and best known of the chains. Thus, it was the perfect corporation to challenge. The girls lost the case, but this didn't discourage others, and there were numerous court cases against McDonald's and other fast food restaurants. In 2005, The Cheeseburger Bill was passed, and it basically stated that customers cannot sue a restaurant and must take responsibility for their own choice of food and any consequences that follow.
4. Fast food has been called "junk food" for a reason. According to the Oxford American Dictionary, junk is something that is “useless or of little value .” In 2004, Morgan Spurlock proved this when he wrote and directed a film called *Super Size Me*. In this documentary, Spurlock only ate food from McDonald's for thirty days. As a result, he did not just gain weight (11 kilos) in this period, but more importantly, his health declined dramatically. After only five days of this “special” diet, he suffered

from headaches. After 21 days, he had heart palpitations, and it was then that his doctor advised him to stop the McDonald's diet. [1] However, Spurlock ignored this advice, continued his experiment, and his health deteriorated even further. It took him almost six months to lose the weight he had gained and get his health back. He was very fortunate that his liver was not permanently damaged.

5. Although McDonald's refused to comment on Spurlock's film, the bad publicity and reduced sales led it to introduce a "lite" line. This demonstrated a "global commitment to promote balanced, active lifestyles." [2] Moreover, McDonald's started to put nutritional information, such as the amount of fat, protein and carbohydrates, on all products. Other fast food restaurants have followed McDonald's lead, and so it is now possible to eat healthy fast food.

6. However, the fact that fast food restaurants offer a healthier alternative does not solve the obesity problem because fatty food can be addictive. And obesity is frequently the result of this form of addiction which is difficult to break. How we look and what we eat are part of our everyday life. When obese people look in the mirror, they often do not like what they see, which makes them feel inadequate or even depressed. To overcome the depression, they turn to the substance they are addicted to, the substance that "comforts" them – they turn to food. And so a vicious cycle is created that no healthier alternatives can solve.

7. A new style of living in the 20th century gave rise to fast food which has ultimately brought about serious physical and psychological disorders. Public demand originally created this phenomenon, but it is time for a new demand. Nowadays, people are becoming more aware of the damage they are doing to their emotional and physical health. Consequently, there is increasing pressure on the food chains to provide food that is delivered with speed along with proper nutritional value. Remember "we are what we eat."

[1] One meaning for 'diet' is food or drink regularly consumed.