

FOOD

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Fast Food vs. Healthy Food

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While fast food may be convenient, healthy food is better for maintaining your weight, getting the right amount of essential nutrients in your diet and keeping yourself healthy. You can even eat healthy for less than it costs to eat fast food with proper planning and some time spent preparing and cooking your food.

Energy Density

Fast food tends to be high in fat, refined grains and added sugars, all of which increase their energy density, or calories per gram. Eating lots of energy-dense foods increases your risk for obesity. Healthy foods, on the other hand, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean protein, tend to be lower in energy density. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a diet low in energy density helps you lose weight because you can eat more food for fewer calories, so you'll be less likely to overeat due to hunger.



Nutrient Density

Part of the problem with fast food is that the high amount of fat and added sugars increase the calories it contains without providing you with essential nutrients. This means fast food is relatively nutrient-poor. A study published in the "Journal of the American College of Nutrition" in 2004 found that the more often people ate fast food, the lower their micronutrient intake was. Choosing healthy foods will help you increase the nutrient density, or nutrients per calorie, of your diet and make it easier for you to meet the recommended intake of essential nutrients.

Effect on Health

While eating healthy foods may lower your risk for health problems including obesity, heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer, fast food can have the opposite effect. A study published in the "European Journal of Clinical Nutrition" in December 2013 found that fast food consumption increases the risk for metabolic syndrome, in part by increasing triglyceride levels. Another study, published in May 2012 in "Obesity Surgery," found that those who ate the most fast food had a higher risk for obesity than those who didn't consume fast food or rarely consumed this type of food. Being obese or overweight increases your risk for heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

Cost Comparison

Although fast food can be cheaper than following a healthy diet, you can plan a healthy diet including low-cost food ingredients that will save you money; compared to a diet based on fast foods. According to an article published in "Family Medicine" in April 2010. This study determined that a healthy diet based on generic, frozen and bulk whole foods was actually less expensive than buying fast food for every meal. Dairy products and vegetables were the most costly items in the healthy diet, followed by meat and fruits.

Fitting Fast Food into a Healthy Diet

A healthy meal consists of about half fruits and vegetables, with the other half of your food divided between whole grains and meats. When you go to a fast-food restaurant, look for the healthiest options, which tend to be grilled or



baked instead of fried. Start with a broth-based soup or salad with low-fat dressing since these are low in energy density and will help fill you up, then get a smaller serving rather than a super-sized serving of your main dish. Vegetarian options are often healthier than meat-based entrees, as long as they aren't fried. Skip the fattier toppings, like mayo sauces, cheese and cream sauces.

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