



The Trend of High Consumption of Fast Foods and Its Impact on Families, Individuals, and Societies

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Abstract

Fast-food consumption has become a global trend in many nations over the last several decades, with people eating meals outside of the home or at home using takeaway or home delivery services provided by food stores. Several studies have found that when compared to children or adults, young adults consume the highest rate of fast foods. Despite the fact that eating fast food is not gender-specific, several studies have found that men consume more fast food than women. Other characteristics include age restrictions, the atmosphere, fast food outlet location, food availability, family eating patterns, and a race/ethnic minority-based location; psychosocial aspects such as fast food variety, an occasion for consuming junk foods, fast food desire, and fast food convenience; and psychosocial aspects such as fast food variety, an occasion for consuming junk foods, fast food desire, and fast food convenience. Processed foods have a large variety of negative health consequences. Overweight/ obesity, heart disease & strokes, diabetes mellitus, cancer, early death, metabolic syndrome, hypertriglyceridemia; mental health problems: depression, psychiatric distress, and violent behavior are all long-term factors. Junk food consumption has been proven in several studies to alter metabolism, diminish muscle strength, promote inflammation, and raise the risk of allergies, asthma, poor indigestion, and constipation in the short term. Fast food consumption is also influenced by social factors such as household poverty and food insecurity. Fast food has a lot of positives, including the fact that it takes less time to prepare, is a better option than skipping a meal, is economical, provides a variety of selections, and creates a large number of job chances. The research revealed a number of flaws that may be addressed in future studies, and the nutrients in fast foods could be considered for the world's future population and future health intervention programs to reduce negative health effects.

Keywords: fast foods, consumption, young adults, health impact

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Introduction

Fast food consumption is more popular among today's generations than traditional cuisines, particularly among the younger generation. According to a study of adults in the United States, one out of every four people consumes fast food (1). People's consumption of fast foods is expanding over the world, and their preferences for these foods are influenced by a variety of factors. Consumption of Western-styled, as well as local fast foods, is thought to be a substantial contributor to a variety of health hazards and chronic disorders. Fast foods are regarded as unhealthy foods because they include a high density of energy, fat, saturated fat, sodium, and calories, and they are delivered in excessive portions to consumers (2, 3). Fast foods from large chains such as McDonald's and KFC outlets still include a high amount of unhealthy substances that biologically affect and contribute to enhancing weight gain, obesity, and other disorders in more than 30 nations (4). Before they can be deemed a healthy diet and served at most fast food establishments, the quality and quantity of these fast foods must be improved.

Influential factors of fast food consumption

Fast food consumption is influenced by a number of social and environmental factors. The population's age and gender are the first and most important factors. According to a study of US adults and children, fast food eating was widespread among 37 percent of adults and 36.3 percent of children (1, 5). These findings support the assertion that fast food consumption is high, especially among the younger generation. Fast food consumption does not differ significantly between men and women (6). However, some study has already shown that fast food consumption is more widespread among males than females, across all racial/ethnic groupings, and across the country (6, 7). Children who eat fast food consume more calories than children who do not eat fast food, according to a CDC study (8). Furthermore, it was shown that children who ate fast food on a daily basis consumed more total energy and had a poorer diet quality than children who did not eat fast food on a daily basis (8). Fast foods appear to have more negative impacts than favorable ones.

Another aspect that influences fast food consumption is urbanization. Fast food establishments are abundant in urban areas, and most studies on fast food consumption have concentrated on high-density urban regions (9, 10). Fast food's accessibility is also to blame for the high intake of harmful foods. Because children and teenagers are the targets demographic for fast food marketing, they consume most of these unhealthy foods (11). According to the evidence, in poor and middle-income nations, 42 percent of school adolescents drink carbonated soft drinks once a day, and 46 percent eat fast food at least once a week, respectively (12). The percentage is 62 percent for adolescents in high-income nations and those who live in cities are 30 percent more likely to eat fast food than those who live in non-metropolitan areas (12, 13). Another study found that lower-income and minority regions had more fast food establishments and energy-dense items (14). Furthermore, a study conducted in Chicago found that fast food restaurants located near schools cause children and adolescents to become more reliant on fast food than homemade cuisine (15). As a result, the location of available fast food areas is an important determinant in the consuming process among children and adolescents.

Several studies have shown that fast food restaurants are more prevalent in ethnic minority neighborhoods than in Caucasians-focused areas (14, 16, 17). However, one study in the United States discovered an unusual result: fast food businesses were twice as numerous near Caucasian and racially mixed people density areas as they were around African-American people density areas (18). Fast foods come in a variety of forms, and studies have shown that eating fast food is associated with higher intakes of energy, fat, salt, added sugars, and sugar-sweetened beverages in children, adolescents, and adults than eating fruits, vegetables, fiber, and milk (19-21). According to studies, the chicken was the most popular fast food, followed by pizza and hamburgers, all of which were tasty (9, 22, 23). Several researches conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States revealed that young teenagers favor unhealthy food consumption, with greater intakes of fat calories, energy intake, soft drinks, cheeseburgers, french fries, and pizza (2, 24). Fast foods had a higher energy density and lower nutritional quality than those prepared at home and suggested by nutritionists, according to the study (25).

Psychosocial factors that influence fast food consumption in children, adolescents, and adults have been discovered in many research around the world. According to several studies, the majority of young adults (33.9%) eat fast food on special occasions and when they meet up with friends (25.7 percent) (26-28). As the number of studies on the factors connected to eating fast food rose among public health researchers, some studies suggested that fast food restaurants could be a major influence in the recent surge in the popularity of fast meals. According to studies, fast food consumption is influenced by the person who chooses the fast food venue's location (59.9 percent) (29). Moreover, a qualitative study showed that the peer behaviour also influence the fast food consumption (30). Fast food consumption is also influenced by the boys' and girls' preferences. According to a research, boys liked fast food when they were hungry (23.1%) and 54.8 percent ate it as a snack, while girls (63.7%) preferred it as a meal (26, 31). Furthermore, according to a survey, even if they are not hungry, male teenagers enjoy fast food as a snack (30). According to another survey, women prefer fast food less than males (32). The age limit was also discovered to be a significant impact in fast food selection. In comparison to young people, 45.5 percent of those over 65 years old never eat fast food in a week, according to a survey (33). Additionally, the study found that flavor, quick food storage conditions, familiarity, and saltiness of fast foods are all important determinants in food preference, with boys being more likely than girls ($P < 0.01$) (26, 34-36). There were also fewer fast food establishments, fewer ads, and fewer sales promotions, all of which were key concerns related to fast food consumption (26). It was discovered that the difference in daily fast food intake between urban and rural teens can be explained by the classification of fast food and purchasing location (fast food establishments vs. neighborhood convenience stores) (37, 38). According to another survey, consumers choose quick food because they dislike cooking (39). Several studies have also discovered that convenience is the most influential factor in people's decision to eat fast food (40, 41).

Negative impacts of fast food on individual and society

Without a doubt, most individuals around the world enjoy fast food as one of their meals. However, it has a large number of negative health and economic consequences, and health specialists have always recommended it to be the least restrictive diet possible. Fast food intake has long- and

short-term consequences for physical and mental health (42). Overweight, obesity, heart disease, strokes, and other long-term health problems can occur in people who eat fast food regularly. Several studies have discovered a link between fast food intake and being overweight, as well as having a less healthy eating pattern (23, 43, 44). In several research, it was also discovered that where fast food establishments were, there was a significant frequency of obesity (31, 45). Evidence on the most frequent health risk known as smoking, on the other hand, was unrelated to fast food consumption and its proximity to consumers such as adolescents (46).

Fast food consumption can lead to a variety of health problems, including heart disease and stroke. Convenient meals were frequently connected to cardiovascular illnesses, according to shards of data (23, 43, 47). Consumers who eat fast food or takeaway eat a lot of calories, fat, saturated fatty acids (SFAs), trans fatty acids (TFAs), added sugar, and sodium (48), which leads to insulin resistance and diabetes mellitus (49, 50). Furthermore, fast food intake has been linked to an increased risk of cancer (51, 52) and an earlier mortality (51, 53). Another long-term effect of fast food consumption among children and adolescents was an increase in metabolic syndrome, abdominal obesity, and hypertriglyceridemia (54, 55). Furthermore, multiple studies conducted throughout the world discovered a strong link between the intake of fast foods and sugar-sweetened beverages and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, psychiatric discomfort, and violent behavior among adolescents (56-60).

There were also some short-term consequences on health from fast foods. In a study, it was shown that eating junk food for a few days could alter one's metabolism. A study found that eating junk food for a few days reduced the muscles' ability to convert glucose into the energy needed by the body (42), increased inflammation, and increased the risk of allergy and auto-inflammatory disease (61, 62). Fast foods have been linked to asthma symptoms (63, 64), heartburn (65), and bad indigestion (66) which can lead to constipation (67, 68).

It also has an effect on household income. According to a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the higher the family's income, the better they consume fast food on a daily basis (69). Low-income people had less preference for fast foods and were less likely to consume them on a regular basis in the 1940s and 1950s than they are now, according to a study, and low-income people had less preference for fast foods and were less likely to consume them on a regular basis in the 1940s and 1950s than they are now, according to another study in the United States (69, 70). However, when the American people are facing food insecurity during COVID-19, they tend to find emotional attachment, belonging, and comfort in the ritual of driving to the burger joint (71). It was also discovered that persons who are food insecure rely on fast food more than the general population for nutrition and comfort (71).

Positive impacts of fast food

Despite their disadvantages, fast food appears to offer some advantages. Fast dishes are easy to prepare and take little time to prepare. Restaurants provide solutions that take 50% less time than preparing a meal at home. A healthy fast food lunch that does not involve fried foods might be a food meal that is healthier than skipping a meal and gives you the choice of eating at a restaurant. Fast foods are one of the most cost-effective food products on the market, making it simpler to

alleviate hunger in society. It could be the most cost-effective food on the market. When a customer decides to eat at a fast food restaurant, he or she can anticipate excellent service while waiting for their food. Some restaurants now include a clear calorie count beside the food items on the menu so that customers may make informed decisions (72, 73). The fast food industry may provide a large number of work possibilities, which will help to enhance the country's economy (74). Fast food generates about \$570 billion in global income, which is more than most countries' GDP and employs over four million people in the United States (75).

Limitations

There are some limitations to the studies on fast food consumption. To begin with, the majority of the study on fast foods has focused on the negative effects on health. There hasn't been much research on the benefits of fast food. Second, quick foods can be nutritious if their contents are improved as a healthy diet, as evidenced by research conducted in recent years. Third, the majority of research study participants were young adults or students, who make up a small percentage of the population. Future studies should focus on a broader audience rather than just youthful consumers. The fourth argument would be the little research that has been done on ethical consumerism in the buying and consumption of fast food. In the context of fast foods, more study on ethical consumerism is required. Another restriction discovered during the literature analysis was that the bulk of the research was conducted in the context of the United Kingdom and the United States, which does not represent the entire picture of fast food consumerism in the world. Future research should focus on the LMICs' environment as well. Last but not least, previous research has shown that a choice such as a "healthy alternative" for fast foods as a healthy diet for young consumers in industrialized countries has minimal implications (76).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the fast food sector has become a huge global public health hazard. The majority of the population's young adults buy and eat fast food, which has a number of drawbacks, some of which are linked to chronic diseases. Unhealthy foods should be avoided at all costs. However, there are occasions when a person must choose a fast food lunch since being hungry is not an option. If the high levels of sugar, fat, and salt in most of the fast food products could be eliminated, such foods may be a nutritious meal option that is also affordable and accessible to people earning minimum wage. More research should be done in the future to analyze and improve the population's dietary pattern and nutrition, as well as future health promotion intervention programs, based on all of these findings.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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