

Fast food -- and other pre-prepared foods -- linked to spike in kids' calories

July 26, 2011 | By Marissa Cevallos, HealthKey / For the Booster Shots blog

Fast food has become an easy target for folks looking to blame something -- anything -- for the prevalence of childhood obesity. And, true, such food can be high in both calories and fat. But it appears the blame might also be shared by other foods eaten outside the home.

Researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill assessed the food intake of nearly 30,000 children between 1977 and 2006 using four surveys. They found that children are consuming 179 more daily calories now than they were in the late 1970s -- and that the increase is driven mostly by food eaten outside the house.

In 1977, about 23% of kids' calories came from outside the home; by 2006, 34% did.

Fast food accounts for some of the increase. But store-bought food eaten away from home also drove the growth in calories, especially between 1994 and 2006. That includes hot-and-ready food at grocery stores (think fried chicken) and pre-packaged sandwiches — food that doesn't require home prep.

Meanwhile, children aren't eating that many fewer calories at home than they did three decades ago, the researchers found. The [results](#) were published online in the Journal of the American Dietetic Assn. The researchers wrote in the discussion of their paper:

“This finding is supported by studies suggesting that overweight individuals do not compensate for increased consumption at away-from-home meals by decreasing intake for the remainder of the day.”

To get an idea of the changes in calories in the three-decade period: The 179 extra calories come from 255 extra calories outside the home, offset by 76 fewer at home. That's forgoing one small apple at home for a small pack of French fries at McDonald's. Or, perhaps, eating two fewer Reese's peanut butter cups at home to have a [Lunchables](#) Chicken & American Sub Sandwich.

Just because the food isn't ordered at a counter doesn't mean it's healthful.

Fast food isn't making our kids fat. It's the rest of their diet

January, 2014 Melissa Healy

Imagine for a moment that all of the nation's fast-food establishments--all the striped awnings and golden arches, the drive-thru windows, the beckoning dollar deals and wafting odor of French fries--were to vanish overnight. Would the number of our kids who carry an unhealthful amount of extra weight plummet?

The answer is very likely no, says a [study](#) published Thursday in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Because if you shut off the supply of 24-ounce fountain drinks, bacon cheeseburgers, fried chicken and stuffed tacos, the children who frequently eat at fast-food restaurants will go home and do what they generally do when not eating at a fast-food restaurant: They'll snarf cookies and chips, chug sugar-sweetened soda from a bottle, and heat up frozen pizzas.

In a new study, researchers from the University of North Carolina led by nutrition professor Barry Popkin have found that even when they are not eating at fast-food restaurants, children who frequent them tend to eat food that would probably make many of them overweight or obese anyway. The authors of the latest research combed through a national database of Americans' health and nutrition behaviors and grouped 4,466 American kids--from ages 2 to 18--according to what they ate when they were not eating food purchased at a fast-food restaurant.

Participants were designated "Western diet" consumers if their consumption from non-fast-food sources was relatively high in saturated fats and added sugars. Those classified as following a "prudent diet" ate more fruits and vegetables, leaner proteins and less added sugar and saturated fat.

After doing so, they went back to the children's detailed food consumption records and categorized them as nonconsumers of fast food (those whose food tracking records indicated no calories consumed from a restaurant or eating establishment without servers), low consumers (whose food tracking records indicated that no more than 30% of their calories came from such an establishment), and high consumers (for whom more than 30% of calories consumed came from a fast-food restaurant).

The result: Those who followed the Western dietary pattern when not dining at fast-food restaurants--even those who were considered "nonconsumers" of fast food--had the highest rates of being overweight or obese. Those who followed a "prudent diet" when not dining on fast food--even those who were considered high consumers of fast food--were significantly less likely to be overweight or obese.

On average, low consumers of fast food were 1.5 times as likely to follow a Western diet pattern of consumption than people who were considered nonconsumers of fast food. High consumers of fast food were 2.2 times as likely to do so.

"Our findings suggest that the location where foods are obtained may not be as important as the nutritional quality of the foods consumed," the authors wrote. They also suggest that "the effect of public health efforts targeted at fast food restaurants may also be overestimated, such that these efforts may be necessary but not sufficient to reduce child obesity if the remainder of the diet is not addressed."

30 Surprisingly Healthy Fast Foods

Burgers, tacos, pizza — find out which of your fast-food favorites aren't so bad after all. Our list includes picks from KFC, McDonald's, Taco Bell, and more, plus healthy fast-food desserts.

By Karen Ansel, RD3K

Drive-Through Done Right

Sometimes eating on the fly is a fact of life. Findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that fast food accounts for more than 15 percent of daily calories for people in their twenties and thirties. If your busy schedule calls for the occasional grab-and-go meal, FITNESS is here to help. Our cheat sheet identifies two safe bets for lunch or dinner at 10 of the most popular chains. With these menu picks, which each have 480 calories or fewer and are low in artery-clogging saturated fat, you can eat burgers, tacos, and fries guilt-free.

McDonald's - Premium Caesar Salad with Grilled Chicken and low-fat balsamic vinaigrette plus Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait; 375 calories, 9.5g fat (4g saturated)

- Grilled Honey Mustard Snack Wrap plus small french fries; 480 calories, 19g fat (5g saturated)

Taco Bell - Fresco Steak Burrito Supreme plus black beans; 430 calories, 10.5g fat (3g saturated)

- Fresco Chicken Soft Taco plus Pintos 'n' Cheese; 330 calories, 10.5g fat (4g saturated)

Dunkin' Donuts - Egg White Veggie Wake-Up Wrap plus hash browns; 350 calories, 18g fat (4.5g saturated)

- Tuna Salad Sandwich on an English muffin; 390 calories, 23g fat (3.5g saturated)

Subway - 6" Subway Club on 9-Grain Wheat Bread with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, green peppers, cucumbers, and Sweet Onion Sauce plus apple slices; 445 calories, 4.5g fat (1.5g saturated)

- Oven Roasted Chicken Salad with tomatoes, green peppers, onions, olives, and cucumbers with honey-mustard dressing plus Yogurt Parfait; 400 calories, 6g fat (1.5g saturated)

Starbucks - Chicken & Hummus Bistro Box (hummus, grilled chicken, grape tomatoes, cucumber, and pita bread) plus a banana; 380 calories, 7g fat (1.2g saturated)

- Zesty Chicken & Black Bean Salad Bowl (grilled chicken, black beans, roasted corn, jicama, tomatoes, feta, greens, and quinoa with chile vinaigrette) plus Seasonal Harvest Fruit Blend; 450 calories, 15g fat (2.5g saturated)

Chipotle - 3 Barbacoa (braised beef) Tacos on soft corn tortillas with lettuce and tomato salsa; 405 calories, 10g fat (2.5g saturated)

- Vegetarian Burrito Bowl with brown rice, black beans, fajita vegetables, lettuce, and roasted chili-corn salsa; 385 calories, 7g fat (1g saturated)

Wendy's - Large Chili plus Garden Side Salad (no croutons) with fat-free French dressing 375 calories, 9 g fat (3.5 g saturated)

- Ultimate Chicken Grill Sandwich plus apple slices 440 calories, 10 g fat (1.5 g saturated)

Panera - Half Smoked Turkey Breast on Artisan Whole Grain Loaf plus Low-Fat Garden Vegetable with Pesto Soup (from the You Pick Two Menu); 320 calories, 6g fat (1g saturated)

- Power Mediterranean Chicken Salad (no bacon) plus Baked Lays Potato Chips; 430 calories, 17g fat (2.5g saturated)

Burger King - Whopper Jr. (no mayo) plus Value-Sized Onion Rings; 410 calories, 18g fat (5.5g saturated)

- Veggie Burger plus apple slices; 440 calories, 16g fat (2.5g saturated)

KFC - 4 Hot Wings plus Sweet Kernel Corn; 380 calories, 16.5g fat (4g saturated)

- Kentucky Grilled Chicken Breast plus mashed potatoes (without gravy) 310 calories; 10g fat (2.5g saturated)

10 More Calorie Bargains

Whether you're craving a sweet snack or looking for lunch, here are more surprisingly diet-friendly finds.

- Burger King 4-piece Chicken Nuggets; 190 calories, 11g fat (2g saturated)
- Chipotle Cheese Quesadilla (kids' size); 190 calories, 11g fat (6g saturated)
- Dunkin' Donuts Cinnamon Cake Munchkins (two) ; 120 calories, 7g fat (3g saturated)
- KFC Original Recipe Chicken Drumstick; 120 calories, 7g fat (1.5g saturated)
- McDonald's Vanilla Soft-Serve Cone; 170 calories, 4.5g fat (3g saturated)
- Panera Power Breakfast Egg White Bowl with Roasted Turkey; 190 calories, 7g fat (1g saturated)
- Starbucks Chocolate Cake Pop; 140 calories, 7g fat (4g saturated)
- Subway Kids' Roast Beef Sandwich; 200 calories, 3g fat (1g saturated)
- Taco Bell Cool Ranch Doritos Locos Taco; 160 calories, 10g fat (3.5g saturated)
- Wendy's Jr. Original Chocolate Frosty; 200 calories, 5g fat (3.5g saturated)

Drive-Through Dos

Eat right on the run with these smart strategies. **Don't fall for health halos.** Some veggie dishes pack nearly 1,000 calories, while a burger may have as few as 250. Read the nutrition facts before you order. **Go high tech.** Speaking of nutrition facts, they're in the palm of your hand with the Fast Food Calorie Counter app (\$1, for iPhone or Android), which lists more than 9,000 menu items. **Look beyond the main menu.** Pint-size portions on the kids' menu can save you calories, and the Dunkin' Donuts all-day breakfast menu has many nutritious picks. Panera has a secret menu with healthy egg-white bowls and a steak lettuce wrap; say you're ordering from the "hidden menu" to get the scoop. **Go skinny-dipping.** Not all condiments are created equal. A ketchup packet has only 10 calories, but those cute little packages of honey mustard and barbecue sauce contain 60 calories and 50 calories, respectively.

How Fast Food Affects You Negatively

by Ivy Morris, Demand Media

Most people realize that stopping at the drive-thru for fast food isn't the healthiest choice. It's no secret that fast food is typically high in fat, sodium and sugar, and low in fruits, vegetables and fiber. But it's convenient and often affordable. The downside, however, is more than just an unbalanced meal. Especially with long-term consumption, fast food can negatively affect you physically and emotionally.

Calories and Weight

The average fast food meal contains too many calories. A 2007 survey from the July 2009 journal "Obesity" found that the average fast food lunch in New York totaled 827 calories. Moreover, one-third of purchases topped 1,000 calories. Your caloric intake varies depending on your energy output. The average adult woman generally needs between 1,600 to 2,400 calories per day, and the average adult man usually needs from 2,000 to 3,000 calories per day. Consuming excess calories puts you at risk of weight gain and weight-related health conditions. In fact, a May 2012 study in "Obesity Surgery" suggested that among behavioral factors, fast food consumption had the most influence on the growing rate of severe obesity in America.

Insulin and Type 2 Diabetes

Regularly eating fast food over an extended period may increase your chances of type 2 diabetes, according to study findings published in a January 2005 "Lancet" article. According to the 15-year study, people who ate fast food at least three times a week gained an extra 9.9 pounds of body weight and had a two-fold greater increase in insulin resistance when compared to those who ate fast food less than once a week. Insulin resistance occurs when the hormone insulin does not properly regulate blood glucose levels. Hypertension, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular disease are also linked to insulin resistance.

Fat and Cardiac Events

Most fast food meals are high in fat and low in or devoid of fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables help balance a high-fat meal, reducing -- but not eliminating -- the adverse effects on the blood vessels. According to a study by Dr. Gary Plotnick, a cardiologist at the University of Maryland Medical Center, within three to five hours after eating a high-fat meal, the blood vessels function abnormally. For a healthy person, this is usually a minor, temporary event. For someone with coronary disease, this could cause a cardiac event, such as a heart attack or stroke.

Depression and Addiction

Researchers have linked fast food to depression. Compared to people who eat little to no fast food, people who regularly eat fast food are 51 percent more likely to develop depression, cites a March 2012 "Public Health Nutrition" article. The more fast food you eat, the greater your risk of depression becomes, the study concluded. Additionally, some research suggests -- but has not proven -- that fast food may be addictive, according to a September 2011 article in "Current Drug Abuse Reviews."

How Fast Food Affects Nutrition In Teens

by Kevin Kolodziejcki, Demand Media

Whether it comes from a restaurant, convenience store, vending machine or kitchen cupboard, Carol Simontacchi, certified clinical nutritionist and author of "The Crazy Makers," says the prevalence of fast food in America has significantly degraded teens' eating habits. A 2007 Centers for Disease Control study found fewer than one in 10 teens consumes the minimum recommended amount of fruits and vegetables a day; a 2004 Harvard study determined three in 10 teens eat four to six meals a week at fast-food restaurants.

Vitamins and Minerals

Teens need vitamins and minerals to function properly, especially during growth spurts. Most fast foods lack these nutrients. A typical large serving of french fries, for example, contains 4.6 milligrams of vitamin C, an antioxidant used to build tissue, remove arterial plaque and battle disease. One cup of raw broccoli contains 101.2 milligrams, 22 times the amount in the french fries. Two ready-to-eat pancakes and 2 tablespoons of pancake syrup contain .20 milligrams of vitamin E, an antioxidant used to counteract cardiovascular disease and cancer. Two slices of whole-wheat toast and 2 tablespoons of peanut butter have 3.2 milligrams, 16 times the amount in the fast-food combination. A commercially prepared pecan shortbread cookie weighs 14 grams and contains 10 milligrams of potassium, a mineral used to normalize blood pressure, convert glucose into energy and sustain nervous system function. A single-serving box of raisins weighs the same, yet has 105 milligrams of potassium, more than 10 times the cookie.

Sodium

Fast food has too much of one mineral, sodium, which elevates blood pressure. High blood pressure can cause heart attacks and strokes. Teens should consume no more than 2,400 milligrams per day, yet many fast-food restaurant items contain more than half that amount. A typical breakfast biscuit with ham can have 1,433 milligrams; a large cheeseburger, 1,589 milligrams; six to eight nachos, 1,800 milligrams. Many single-item snack foods also contain staggering amounts. While a 10-ounce plain baked potato only has 25 milligrams of sodium, 10 ounces of typical potato chips have 1,680 milligrams, 67 times that amount.

Calories

Fast-food meals tend to be high in sugar, fat and processed grains and low in fiber, making them 65 to 100 percent more calorically dense than other meals, causing teens to underestimate the number of calories in fast-food meals. A Harvard Medical School survey, for example, found four out of five did so, with three of 10 off by at least 500 calories. Per gram, french fries have nearly seven times the calories as broccoli; shortbread pecan cookies, almost nine times grapes, the fruit dried to make raisins. The large-sized soft drinks found in fast-food restaurants and convenience stores can contain 400 calories of pure sugar -- nutritionally void calories that do little to alleviate hunger. Adolescents in a 2004 "Journal of the American Medical Association" study -- whether overweight or lean -- ate an average of 1,652 calories per fast-food meal, or 62 percent of their daily requirement. Overweight teens in the study averaged even more, yet did less meal adjusting afterwards to balance energy intake.

Obesity and Disease

In large part, increased consumption of fast food has created a 250 percent increase in obese teens between 1980 and 2008, according to the National Institutes of Health. Obese teens face a greater risk of eventual disease, including certain cancers, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, as well as early death. Part of the metabolic syndrome cluster, obesity makes developing Type 2 diabetes as an adult 11 times more likely, says Dr. Mark DeBoer, assistant professor at the University of Virginia. A 2008 "Time" article revealed that nine out of 10 overweight kids -- not just obese ones -- already have at least one harbinger of heart disease. In a study presented to the International Congress on Obesity in 2010, researchers revealed that males who begin adulthood obese have twice the chance of dying prematurely compared to the non-obese.

Relationship Between Fast Food & the Brain

by Sara Ipatenco, Demand Media

You already know that eating large amounts of fast food can cause weight gain because it's high in calories, sugar and fat. Fast food, however, can also have a negative effect on the health of your brain. The lack of nutrients in fast food, as well as the presence of unhealthy ingredients, contributes to a decrease in brain health.

Brain Damage

A steady diet of fast food can rob your brain of certain nutrients it needs to function properly. Most fast food is nutrient-poor, which leaves your body deficient in the vitamins and minerals your brain needs. For example, omega-3 fatty acids, present in foods like salmon, walnuts and olive oil, are crucial to keeping your brain in tip-top shape, according to a 2010 article published in "Nature Reviews Neuroscience." At the same time, eating large amounts of trans fats, found in many fast foods, can interfere with normal neuronal firing, the article explains. This can have a negative impact on brain health because it essentially damages the neurons in such a way that they aren't able to fire properly.

Mental Health Disorders

An unhealthy diet interferes with neurotransmitters responsible for happiness and feelings of well-being. Consuming too little of the amino acid tryptophan, for example, can increase feelings of depression and anger, according to Gary L. Wenk, a professor of psychology and neuroscience writing for the Psychology Today website. A diet low in omega-3 fatty acids increases the risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dementia, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Cognitive Ability

The human brain contains synapses, which are partly responsible for learning and memory. Eating too many calories can interfere with the brain's ability to produce healthy, normally functioning synapses, which can have a negative impact on cognition. This is a concern with fast food because many of your options, such as pizza, burgers, fries, nachos, soda and milkshakes, are high in calories. Regularly eating high-calorie meals can impair learning and memory capabilities.

Keeping Your Brain Healthy

The occasional fast food meal isn't likely to cause a problem with your brain, but regularly including them in your diet is a problem. For one thing, eating high-sugar foods, such as milkshakes, is addictive, and pretty soon you're going to want to keep eating the same sugary foods over and over again. Chances are, you might also order a burger and fries to go with the shake. Instead of relying on fast food, fill your diet with fruits, vegetables and whole grains, all of which supply nutrients your brain needs for good health. Boost your intake of omega-3 fatty acids by eating salmon once or twice a week, having walnuts for a snack and cooking with olive oil instead of butter.

These Disturbing Fast Food Truths Will Make You Reconsider Your Lunch

The Huffington Post | By Renee Jacques

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McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Taco Bell -- which one are you craving today? It's pretty likely that you have a favorite fast food chain and that you love many of the tasty options offered at these restaurants. It's hard to miss them. As of 2012, there were **263,944 fast food restaurants in America** with a combined revenue of well over \$100 billion.

With a **Gallup poll** revealing that 8 in 10 Americans eat fast food at least monthly and half saying they eat it weekly, these companies know they have a good thing going. And with all the savvy marketing they do, it's no wonder you're itching for that Big Mac. But before you scarf one down, you might want to truly evaluate what's going on with your fast food. Here are some truths that may make you wonder if you still want to go to *there* for lunch.

Look at this delicious egg sandwich from Subway:



Too bad you're eating a lot more than just eggs:



David DiSalvo, a writer at Forbes, **decided to really look into the eggs in popular fast food breakfast sandwiches**. What he discovered was that their "eggs" are **really a strange concoction that includes eggs and "premium egg blend."** Some things that are in this special blend include glycerin, a solvent found in soap and shaving cream, dimethylpolysiloxane, a silicone that can also be found in Silly Putty, and calcium silicate, a sealant used on roofs and concrete. The age of just cracking an egg and cooking it has long since passed.

Here's what you get when you order McNuggets:



But this is what they may have looked like before:



"Mechanically-separated meat" is a mixture created when the **bones and carcass of a leftover chicken are mixed together in a food processor**. There's been a lot of back and forth about what that lovely pinkish sludge actually looks like, but chef Jamie Oliver decided to create a chicken mixture, shown above, to show what it might theoretically look like. This slime is then molded into a nugget shape, breaded and fried. However, **McDonald's has released a statement** indicating that the company "does not process any of its meat products in the manner that is described in the mechanically separated chicken story or photo" and that nuggets made in the U.S. are "made from USDA inspected boneless white meat chicken." Reddit user "Dfunkatron," who claimed to be a former McDonald's employee, **told a horrifying story about his workplace:** "[...] I accidentally left a whole bag of about 100 chicken nuggets out on a counter for way too long. They melted. Into a pool of liquid. I never understood why. But they were completely indiscernible as being the nuggets i once knew."

Here's a Doritos Locos taco from Taco Bell:



This meat-in-a-bag looks extremely appetizing ... it sort of reminds us of gingerbread. Back in 2011, Taco Bell came under fire over claims that its meat was only **36 percent beef**. While the controversy has been cleared up and we now know that **Taco Bell is serving meat**, there's something weird about the fact that it gets delivered in plastic-wrapped sheets.

Mmm, here's a yummy McRib:



Recently, the limited-time only McRib created headlines when a Reddit user **shared what the McRib "patty" looks like frozen**. Don't worry, the "breaks" in the meat aren't real bone

Maybe you're trying to be healthy with a side salad:



But unfortunately it may have some questionable chemicals in it...

Unsurprisingly, most fast food restaurants don't list the exact ingredients in their lettuce -- you wouldn't think they'd need to -- but many places dust their salads with propylene glycol to keep the leaves crisp. While **considered safe for consumption**, propylene glycol can be found in antifreeze and sexual lubricants. Above, a picture of someone's Burger King "side salad." We can't tell what's on it, exactly, but it looks sad.

You love the tomato-based sauces at your favorite chain restaurant...



But the FDA is cool if that sauce has maggots and fly eggs in it...



On the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration's** reports on "Inspections, Compliance, Enforcement and Criminal Investigations," the agency says it's acceptable for sauces to contain "30 or more fly eggs per 100 grams" and "1 or more maggot per 100 grams." At those levels, you probably wouldn't notice, and if you did, it's really just protein anyways. But still ... yum.

Here are America's favorite fries:



And here are those fries after aging for three years:



(Credit: *Imgur/atopiary*)

These McDonald's and KFC fries were sealed in these jars in 2008, and the photo was taken in 2012. A little more than three years later and the McDonald's fries show few signs of aging. Marion Nestle, chairwoman of NYU's food studies program, **told Salon** that you can thank heavy servings of preservatives for that ageless quality. She said McDonald's would have to use "a lot of **sodium propionate** to prevent bacterial or mold growth." If only eating fries would keep you looking so young.

There's nothing like an order of Papa John's pizza:



But the company refuses to tell you what's actually in their pies...



Their motto may be "Better Ingredients, Better Pizza," but Papa John's won't let you in on just what those "better ingredients" are. Melanie Warner, a writer for US News, **found out firsthand** when she called a Papa John's and asked about the ingredients. The employee told her, "I think they're listed on the website." When Warner realized **the complete ingredient information wasn't actually listed there**, she called Papa John's customer toll free number. She was told that if she wanted "additional information on allergen or nutritional info," she should leave a message with a certain representative. She left two messages and never got a call back.

While we're still largely in the dark, at least we know that **Papa John's has pledged to stop raising sows in gestation crates**, which confines pregnant pigs in small enclosures in which they cannot move. While mystery still remains as to what *exactly* is in Papa John's pizza, they're not the only ones who withhold this information.

Perhaps you would like to warm up with some Wendy's chili:



It's filled with sandy goodness...

Wendy's **claims their chili has an "award-winning taste."** Maybe that's because it **has silicon dioxide in it.** Also known as silica, silicon dioxide can be found in **quartz or sand.** It also serves as an "anti-caking agent," allowing the chili to stay looking fresh.

Here is the McDonald's classic: a tasty hamburger:



And it looks like you can still eat it 14 years later:



Yes, that is what a McDonald's hamburger looked like after a man forgot it in his coat pocket ... *in 1999.* David Whipple, **revealed to the TV show "The Doctors," that this 14-year-old burger appeared to have never aged.** In 2010, J. Kenji López-Alt conducted a series of tests for Serious Eats to figure out if various burgers would rot over time. He theorized that the burger didn't "**because its small size and relatively large surface area help it to lose moisture very fast.** Without moisture, there's no mold or bacterial growth." We dare you to take a bite.

