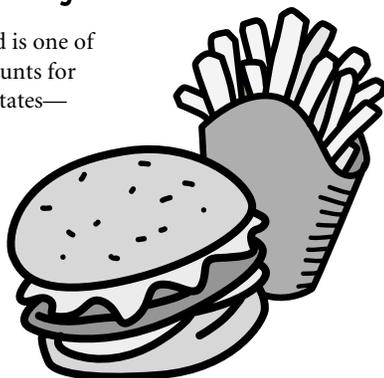


The Global Spread of Food Uniformity

From onion rings to double cheeseburgers, fast food is one of the world's fastest growing food types. It now accounts for roughly half of all restaurant revenues in the United States—triple its share in the early 1970s—and continues to expand there and in many other industrial countries. But some of the most rapid growth is occurring in the developing world, where it's radically changing the way people eat.

People buy fast food because it's cheap, quick, and heavily promoted. But its benefits can be deceptive. Meals devoured in the car or at our desks are replacing homecooked fare enjoyed with family and friends. Around the world, traditional diets and recipes are yielding to sodas, burgers, and other highly processed and standardized items that are high in fat, sugar, and salt—fuelling a global epidemic of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses. Meanwhile, fast food producers require farmers to raise uniform fields of crops and herds of live-stock for easy processing, eliminating agricultural diversity.

Those in less of a hurry are finding alternatives. Fresh organic foods are increasingly popular in Europe, Japan, and the United States. And a "slow food" movement founded in Italy in 1986 to promote appreciation of food and the cultural experience of shared meals now claims 100,000 members in 80 countries worldwide.



DID YOU KNOW...?

- * At many fast-food restaurants, a single meal gives a disproportionate share—sometimes more than 100 percent—of the recommended daily intake of fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar.
- * In the United States, an estimated 65 percent of adults are overweight or obese, leading to an annual loss of 300,000 lives and to at least \$117 billion in health care costs in 1999.
- * A recent study showed that children who drink sodas and other sugar-sweetened drinks are more often obese and that this risk increases another 60 percent with each additional beverage consumed.
- * McDonald's, which operates 30,000 restaurants in 119 countries and serves 46 million customers each day, earned \$15.4 billion in revenues in 2002. On opening day in Kuwait City, the line for the McDonald's drive-thru was more than 10 kilometers long.
- * India's fast-food industry is growing by 40 percent a year and is expected to generate over a billion dollars in sales by 2005. Meanwhile, a quarter of India's population remains under-nourished—a number virtually unchanged over the past decade.
- * China is now home to 800 KFCs and 100 Pizza Huts.
- * Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, the world's two largest soft drink companies, are the thirteenth and twentieth largest advertisers in the world; together, they spent \$2.4 billion on ads in 2001.
- * Coca-Cola sells more than 300 drink brands in over 200 countries and employs 60,000 people in Africa alone. Its net revenues reached \$19.6 billion in 2002—with more than 70 percent of its income originating outside of the United States.

SUCCESS STORIES

- ❖ Governments and corporations are beginning to respond to widespread concerns about fast food. The U.S. state of California now taxes junk food, helping to reduce overall consumption while also generating potential additional revenues for health education. More recently, a new law phased out the sale of all junk food (including soda) in the state's public elementary schools by early 2004.
- ❖ Kraft, the world's largest food company, plans to cut advertising directed at children, to shrink its portion sizes, and to eliminate some of its most unhealthy products.
- ❖ In 2002, bowing to pressure from animal rights and public health groups, McDonald's announced that it would stop buying eggs from chickens confined in battery cages and forced to lay additional eggs through starvation—practices already banned in Europe. By 2004, McDonald's will require chicken suppliers to stop giving their birds antibiotics to promote growth and will choose indirect suppliers who don't use antibiotics over those who do.



SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Avoid buying sodas and other junk foods that have low nutritional value and are high in fat, sugar, and salt.
- ✓ Keep healthy snacks in your car and home to defeat the urge to stop at fast food joints.
- ✓ Try to cook at least one big meal a week and save your leftovers so you're not compelled to buy takeout for the next few nights.
- ✓ Join the growing Slow Food movement by contacting the local chapter in your area or by attending one of their events.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

Start a dinner club with friends in which you each take turns preparing and hosting a monthly dinner. Or get together with friends to cook a month's worth of dinners that can be frozen as an alternative to takeout.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ☛ **Slow Food** (www.slowfood.com) is a worldwide movement for the protection of the "right to taste" that organizes food and wine events and initiatives, raises the profile of products, and promotes local artisans and wine cellars.
- ☛ **Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust** (www.oldwayspt.org) is a non-profit organization that promotes sound nutrition and translates complex food science into a consumer-friendly tool for consumers, health professionals, chefs, farmers, journalists, and the food industry.
- ☛ **Fast Food Nation**, by Eric Schlosser (Houghton Mifflin: 2001), provides a fascinating—and alarming—glimpse into the fast food culture in the United States.
- ☛ **The Eat Well Guide** (www.eatwellguide.org) is a national online resource that lists sustainable farmers, restaurants, and stores in the United States.