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The Impact of Fast Food on the Well-being of Youth in the US

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Every day, millions of children and adolescents consume bizarre amounts of fast food. They are lured by its great consistent taste, convenience, affordability, and enticing marketing that they are constantly exposed to. It seems to be an optimal option for food on a daily, but the true cost and impact remain hidden from these millions of youth left completely vulnerable to the marketing and convenience of fast food meals. One is left to wonder what impact fast food may have on the overall health and well-being of youth in the United States. The reality is that the high consumption of fast food, caused in part by the fast food industry's aggressive marketing strategies and lack of regulation, has numerous significant detrimental consequences on the health and well-being of children and adolescents, including a notably increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases, as well as cognitive and academic losses.

The obesity epidemic in youth in the US is caused, almost single-handedly, by the shocking amounts of fast-food consumption. The fat content of fast food is generally significantly higher than most other foods, and the rising consumption of this extra fat is linked to the soaring rates of obesity. According to the CDC, fast food consumption is linked to an increased intake of calories, fat, and sodium (Fryar). Additionally, the CDC reports that fast food consumption rates have been steadily increasing and over one-third of youth in the US consume fast food on any given day (Fryar). Another CDC brief states that around twenty percent of US youth suffer from obesity (Sandoval). These numbers are shockingly high and have grown proportionately, confirming that fast food does indeed induce obesity. This is quite an urgent and serious matter, as overweight and obesity are primarily associated with many cardiac complications and other, both immediate and long-term, serious health issues (Singhal), that have not yet been manifested in US youth generations that have grown up eating fast food. Thus, the alarmingly elevated levels of fast food consumption in the US are nearly entirely responsible for the increase in obesity among young people.

Furthermore, fast food consumption causes numerous adverse neurocognitive health effects. A peer-reviewed study found that the saturated fatty acids and simple carbohydrates found in the majority of fast food selections are detrimental to brain function, damage cognition, and worsen the pathology of Alzheimer's disease (Baranowski). This is quite profound given recent evidence that a third of dementia cases may be preventable (Baranowski), meaning that if US youth enhanced their diet, through less fast-food consumption, youth could prevent dementia and protect their neurocognition for the rest of their lives, and, theoretically, US dementia cases could decrease by over thirty-three percent. Despite this, dementia and Alzheimer’s disease cases have been rising considerably (Baranowski). Additionally, a peer-reviewed research article showed that, even in the short-term, eating fast food regularly is associated with lower math and reading skills, as well as impaired overall academic performance, compared with youth who do not eat fast food as much (Thomas). Moreover, regular fast-food intake has been linked with lower energy and much higher risks of depression (Thomas). To this end, limiting or stopping the consumption of fast food would significantly reduce neurocognitive problem risks for youth in the United States.

Fast food is disastrous in all health aspects. Given all these downsides and dangers, it is only left to ponder why a child or adolescent in the US would continue eating fast food. There turns out to be various reasons why US youth continue eating fast food on a regular basis. Fast food is designed to be addictive to stimulate the brain and keep youth coming for more. The fat, sugar, and starches in most fast food selections are readily absorbed and reward the brain with instant pleasure (Moss). Once youth in the US eat fast food due to its convenience, affordability, and/or taste, a few times, a neurologic dependency is born, and it’s very hard to stop (Singh). Moreover, most fast food

companies gear their deceptive and attractive marketing to youth, further stimulating the brain, and instilling a deep desire in youth that is hard to resist for their still-developing minds (Sandoval). Large, multi-billion dollar fast food companies care only about income and customer retention and will continue doing whatever it takes to increase those two aspects of success. In conclusion, the intentional addictiveness of fast food, coupled with the common targeted marketing towards youth, makes eating fast food regularly a challenging habit to break. Despite the numerous negative health impacts of fast food, these two powers keep children and adolescents in the US as repeat customers.

In conclusion, the fast-food industry's aggressive marketing strategies and addictive nature of fast food, along with a lack of adequate regulations on the industry is fueling the soaring rates of fast food consumption among children and adolescents in the United States. This has proved and will continue to prove very costly to the health and well-being of the millions of youth in the US who routinely eat fast food. It is crucial to raise awareness of the many dangers of fast food consumption, provide healthier, convenient, and tasty options, and advocate for stricter regulations on the industry in order to protect the next generations of Americans.

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