
Fast food: rising demand, pros and cons

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Abstract

Today's world is fast moving, people moving faster, fast food has become the fastest accepted norm for the day. It is not only easier to prepare (thus making it fast food), it is also faster to eat (usually on the way), and, it is now-a-days a major source of nutrition for young, old, low-income, urban, rural, working, non-working people across various nations. Due to some social and cultural factors, fast foods have become very popular, but, their pros and cons are yet to be evaluated. The present paper attempts to provide an overview of these factors.

Key Words: Diseases, Health, Fast food, Lifestyle, Working.

Introduction

Food, food, food everywhere and no place to eat, resembles the age old saying water, water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink. Strange it is indeed because the choices are so many it becomes so difficult for a customer to choose from. Moreover with the advent of fast food the scenario is still more complex. "Food diversity in India is an implicit characteristic of India's diversified culture consisting of different regions and states within" (Goyal and Singh, 2007). Traditionally, Indians like to have home-cooked meals, a concept supported religiously as well as individually. However, with times due to increasing awareness and influence of western culture, there is a slight shift in food consumption patterns among urban Indian families. "It started with eating outside and moved on to accepting a wide variety of delicacies from world-over" (Goyal and Singh, 2007). "Today, fast food industry is getting adapted to Indian food requirements and is growing in India, it is gaining acceptance primarily from Indian youth and younger generations and is becoming part of life" (Goyal and Singh, 2007). "Keeping in view the Indian habits and changing preferences towards food consumption, this study has its focus to understand the factors affecting the perception of Indian youth, in the age group of 20-30 years, towards consumption of fast food as well as towards making choice of fast food outlets" (Goyal and Singh, 2007).

Fast food

"From onion rings to double cheeseburgers, fast food is one of the world's fastest growing food types. Fast foods are quick, reasonably priced, and readily available alternatives to home cooked food. While convenient and economical for a busy lifestyle, fast foods are typically high in calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar, and salt" (www.health.allrefer.com).

Fast food has been defined by Bender and Bender (1995) as a "general term used for a limited menu of foods that lend themselves to production-line techniques; suppliers tend to specialize in products such as hamburgers, pizzas, chicken, or sandwiches".

In Data Monitor's (2005) survey the fast food market is defined as the sale of food and drinks for immediate consumption either on the premises or in designated eating areas shared with other foodservice operators, or for consumption elsewhere.

The free dictionary says "fast food is inexpensive food, such as hamburgers and fried chicken, prepared and served quickly".

Definitions as to what constitutes fast food vary in the literature. Some (e.g. Harrison & Marske, 2005; Pereira et al., 2005) define it "broadly as pre-packed meals or ready-to eat/ convenience food", whereas others "Reidpath, Burns, Garrard, Mahoney, & Townsend, 2002 adopt a narrower definition of fast food as that which is purchased from one of the five largest (Australian) food chains namely Pizza Hut, McDonalds, Hungry Jack's, KFC, or Red Rooster".

Reasons for increase in demand for fast food: Fast food industry in India

According to worldwatch.org, "India's fast-food industry is growing by 40 percent a year and supposed to generate over a billion dollars in sales in 2005 as per their estimates". "Before the entry of multinational fast food outlets, Nirula's was a popular domestic fast food provider for eating-out. Nirula's started with ice-cream parlours and later moved on the range of fast food including burgers, pizzas, sandwiches etc. Established in 1934, Nirula's today is a diversified group having a chain of Elegant Business Hotels, Waiter Service Restaurants, Family Style Restaurants, Ice Cream Parlours, Pastry Shops and Food Processing Plants in India. The chain with over 60 outlets operating in five states successfully caters to the Indian palate of over 50,000 guest everyday for over 70 years"(www.nirula.com). After liberalization in 1991, fast food industry has grown in India.

With changing life style and aggressive marketing by fast food outlets, fast food is also becoming popular in small towns; therefore, success of existing fast food outlets and entry of more is inevitable (Gupta, 2003).

There are various **reasons** for the increase in demand for fast food, they are gender roles, customer sophistication and confidence, paucity of time, double income group, working women, large population, relaxation in rules and regulations, and, menu diversification

Advantages of fast food

Fast food is convenient and saves money

"Food served is within reach. A few walk from your home or office. They are everywhere and available anytime of the day (www.sampateek.com). Fast food is much cheaper than dinner in restaurants, and is almost eaten by everyone" (www.fastfoodmenuprices.com).

Fast food offers on the go meals and save time

"We are in modern times where everything is fast moving and mobile. So people prefer foods eaten while doing their stuffs, like while working, driving or watching movie (www.sampateek.com). There is very low or no waiting period, and, food is usually prepared in a matter of minutes and you can be on your way" (www.fastfoodmenuprices.com).

Fast foods are very accessible

"Fast food joints are very accessible, you can find them everywhere, in the city, and even in the provinces has fast food restaurants; so everybody can have the chance to enjoy these foods. You can save time as there is very low or no waiting time for food to be served"

(www.sampateek.com).

Fast food offers comfort food

"Fast food menu items satisfy our cravings and palates with no struggle in preparation, cooking and serving. These restaurants aim to provide delicious meals so that their customers will keep on coming back" (www.sampateek.com).

Fast food is budget-friendly

"If you are living alone, it is most likely that you will buy your meals from fast food. Some would think it's cheaper to buy food because most fast food chains offer different meals that would fit within your budget" (www.sampateek.com).

Disadvantages of fast food

There are various disadvantages of fast foods. Health problems like obesity, diabetes, heart attacks, fatty liver, cholesterol etc. have emerged. "In Australia, almost 60% of men and women are either overweight or obese, a rate 2.5 times higher than in 1980" (Cameron et al., 2003). "Australian lifestyles have changed dramatically over past decades with more women in the workforce and people working longer hours" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). However, "energy dense fast food is also regularly highlighted as being a problematic part of the obesity issue (e.g. Duffey, Gordon-Larsen, Jacobs, Williams, & Popkin, 2007; Nelson, Gordon-Larson, North, & Adair, 2006; Nielsen & Popkin, 2003; Pereira et al., 2005; Rodriguez & Moreno, 2006)".

Following paragraphs reveal in detail the disadvantages associated with fast food

Fast food is high in fat

"Most fast food items are usually cooked in fat like French Fries and Donuts, which makes these foods calorie dense. Eating such can lead to undesirable weight gain and many other health issues" (www.sampateek.com). "The production process involved in creating fast food adds a lot of greasy and fat content to foods" (www.fastfoodmenuprices.com).

Fast foods are lower quality foods

"Fast food is made in a bulk production process which tends to lower overall quality of food" (www.fastfoodmenuprices.com).

Fast food contains food additives and preservatives

"Most fast food items have food additives and preservatives which can cause cell damage and may lead to certain types of cancer if taken in excessive amount or frequently" (www.sampateek.com).

Fast foods are high in Sugar

"Desserts like ice cream, cakes and pastries are packed with sugar that if taken in large amounts can cause elevated blood sugar that may lead to diabetes" (www.sampateek.com).

Fast food are high in Sodium

"These include pizza, fries and chips that if taken in excessive amount could lead to cardiovascular and kidney disease. It is because these foods are known to contain very high sodium content from the added salt and other preservatives" (www.sampateek.com).

Conclusion

Eat healthy and live healthy, this has led the world think about greener and faster options. This paper has explored the pros and cons that are advantages and disadvantages of fast foods. The Indian food industry is undergoing a lot of changes which makes us think that fast but healthy food is the need of the day. Facts highlighting about the eating habits, nutritional aspects, and quality of unhealthy foods, their health impact and preventive measures should be given to create awareness and render health education for a change towards good eating practices.

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