

Burger Battles

A new study shows fast-food advertising to kids is on the rise.

There's a huge food fight going on across the United States! On one side are the fast-food giants—Wendy's, Burger King, McDonald's, KFC, and others. On the other side are many health experts who say that too much fast food is ruining the health of kids. They say most fast food has too many calories; too much **sodium**, a chemical element in salt; and too much saturated fat for kids to eat more than just once in a while.



C. J. Burton/Corbis

Making healthy food choices is not always easy.

Despite such warnings, kids are eating more fast food than ever. That's the conclusion of a team at Yale University. The team, led by Jennifer Harris, spent a year studying what kids ate at fast-food restaurants.

The Yale team discovered that one-third of U.S. kids eat some type of fast food every day. It also found that 84 percent of parents take their 2- to 11-year-old kids out to eat fast food every week.



Fotolia

To Harris, the findings amount to a serious health crisis for kids and teens in the United States.

“There is a lot of research showing that eating fast food is harmful to young people’s health, increasing the rate of obesity,” Harris told *WR News*. “The number of teens who are overweight has tripled since 1980, and the number of overweight kids younger than 13 has more than doubled during the same period.”

Childhood obesity is known to increase the chances of heart disease and **diabetes** later in life. Diabetes is a disorder in which the body doesn’t produce enough **insulin**. That is a hormone that helps the body use the sugar in food for energy.

Big Advertising

If eating a lot of fast food is bad for a person’s health, why are so many kids rushing off to McDonald’s, Burger King, KFC, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, and Wendy’s? The restaurants all have tasty, low-cost food, for sure. But Harris says that advertising also plays a big role.

“The companies put out a lot of ads ... directed toward kids,” she says.

According to the report, 6- to 11-year-olds saw 3.5 ads

each day. Most of them appear on television, but many now also appear on the Internet on kids' sites, says Harris.

In 2006, the major fast-food companies signed a voluntary agreement to help **promote** their healthier menu selections. To promote is to highlight.

In an e-mail to *WR News*, Neil Golden, McDonald's senior vice president and chief marketing officer, said that his company has kept that pledge. "We primarily advertise our popular 375-calorie four-piece Chicken McNugget Happy Meal, which includes Apple Dippers, low-fat caramel dip, and a jug of 1 percent low-fat milk," he wrote. "We ... remain committed to offering our customers a wide variety of quality food [choices that include] fruit, juice, and dairy options in our Happy Meals."

The Spirit of the Agreement

Harris believes that fast-food companies need to do more. "If they had done what they said they were going to do," she told *WR News*, "they would show only Apple Dippers and milk in their advertising to children. ... The ads usually only show the [Happy Meal] box or the toy that comes with the Happy Meal."

Once kids are in the restaurant, she says, more often than not they buy Happy Meals that contains fries, not Apple Dippers. "Parents have to specifically ask for the healthy alternative," she says. "And often they just accept what's in the box."

Chew On This!

Fast-food restaurants offer a lot of choices, so it's easy to eat healthily on the go. How would you mix and match the foods below to create a healthy fast-food meal?



Fotolia

Fast Facts:

In 1972, people in the United States spent \$3 billion a year on fast food. In 2009, they spent more than \$110 billion.



Hulton Archive/Getty Images

McDonald's has more than 31,000 restaurants in 119 countries on six continents. Burger King has more than 12,000 restaurants in 73 countries. KFC has 16,264 restaurants in 108 countries, serving about 12 million people.



Bloomberg/Getty Images

KFC was the first U.S. fast-food chain in China, in 1992. Today, KFC is the largest and fastest-growing fast-food chain in China, with more than 3,000 restaurants in more than 650 cities.



AP Images

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Who conducted the study described in the article?
 - A McDonald's
 - B the U.S. government
 - C Yale University
 - D a group of parents

2. The passage analyzes two sides of this argument: Are fast-food restaurants doing enough to promote healthier menu selections? Which of the following is most likely the author's point of view?
 - A Fast-food restaurants need to do more to promote healthy choices.
 - B Most fast-food restaurants are doing enough to promote healthy choices.
 - C Fast-food restaurants are promoting too many healthy selections.
 - D Fast-food restaurants should be closed until they promote healthier menus.

3. Why does the writer include the 11th paragraph ("In an e-mail to *WR News*, Neil Golden...") in the passage?
 - A to warn people about the dangers of obesity
 - B to show the perspective of McDonald's
 - C to persuade people to order Apple Dippers
 - D to describe the contents of a Happy Meal

4. Read these sentences from the passage: "Parents have to specifically ask for the healthy alternative," she says. "And often they just accept what's in the box."

In this sentence, the word **specifically** means

- A clearly
 - B politely
 - C forcefully
 - D intelligently

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe
 - A why fast-food restaurants are becoming more popular
 - B the problem of childhood obesity in the United States
 - C both the pros and cons of eating fast food once a week
 - D the results of a new study on fast-food restaurants

6. What is insulin?

7. How might Jennifer Harris feel if fast-food restaurants stopped advertising to kids?
How do you know?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Childhood obesity, _____ is on the rise in the United States, is known to increase the chances of heart disease and diabetes later in life.

- A before
- B which
- C because
- D yet

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

According to a recent study, 84 percent of parents in the United States take their kids out to eat fast food each week.

Who? _____

Where? _____

(do) What? _____

When? each week

10. **Vocabulary Word:** voluntary: acting of one's own free will.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1140

Featured Text Structure: Persuasive – the writer analyzes both sides of an argument and offers convincing proof of his/her point of view in order to influence the reader

Passage Summary: “Burger Battles” describes a recent study that concludes kids are eating more fast food than ever before.

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6. What is insulin?

Suggested answer: Insulin is a hormone that helps the body use the sugar in food for energy.
[paragraph 6]

7. How might Jennifer Harris feel if fast-food restaurants stopped advertising to kids? How do you know?

Suggested answer: She would most likely be happy since she is a critic of their advertising techniques. Harris is quoted saying, "If they had done what they said they were going to do, they would show only Apple Dippers and milk in their advertising to children. ... The ads usually only show the [Happy Meal] box or the toy that comes with the Happy Meal." [paragraph 12]

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9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

According to a recent study, 84 percent of parents in the United States take their kids out to eat fast food each week.

Who? **84 percent of parents**

Where? **in the United States**

(do) What? **take their kids out to eat fast food**

When? each week

10. **Vocabulary Word:** voluntary: acting of one's own free will.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.