

A Public Health Concern: The Epidemic
of Obesity in Children and Adolescents
*Unwise to Super Size!*Nicholas A Kerna^{1,2*}¹College of Medicine, University of Science, Arts and Technology, Montserrat, BWI²Department of Pediatrics, Suriwongse Medical Center, Thailand

Article Information

Received date: Apr 30, 2018

Accepted date: May 04, 2018

Published date: May 06, 2018

*Corresponding author

Nicholas A Kerna, University of
Science, Arts and Technology, USA,
Email: nicholas.kerna@usat.eduDistributed under Creative Commons
CC-BY 4.0

Article DOI 10.36876/smpmph.1012

Preface

Certain books, novels, movies, videos or documentaries go on to stand the test of time. Unbeknownst at the hour of their conception and time of their creation, they transform into traditional or cult classics worthy of being read or watched again and again. One such documentary that falls betwixt and between these two classic types premiered in 2004. *Super Size Me* is an Academy Award Nominated Documentary about a young man, Morgan Spurlock (also the documentary's creator and director), who goes on a fast-food-only diet for 30 days, and records the physical and emotional fallout that resulted from this noxious eating regimen.

Discussion

This documentary covered many concepts about diet; and not only how diet affects the body, but also how diet affects the mind and spirit and performance. It also contained a few more layers, such as why the fast food world is the way it is: because of lobbyists and other vested interest groups. Fast food is a big part of many peoples' lives; in particular, the lifestyles of many children and adolescents. *Super Size Me* presents graphic evidence as to why the fast food diet should not be such a big part of a person's mealtime routine. A fast food meal here, a fast food meal there-borne out of convenience or deperation—is understandable and, most would say acceptable; but not as a regular or integral part of the developing juvenile diet.

It was disturbing to note that, during the filming of this documentary (between February 1, 2003 to March 2, 2003), none of the physicians who evaluated the protagonist (Spurlock) opined that a fast food diet for thirty days might have any significant adverse affects on the body; in particular, the blood chemistry. This unforeseen fact illustrated how far removed physicians were from fast food facts at that time—surprisingly, not so long ago.

There is so much more awareness, today, of the potential dangers of fast foods and junk foods, and how they can negatively affect the physical and emotional development of the child and adolescent. Thus, in this regard, awareness of fast food negative impact, progress has been made. That being so, it is perplexing why obesity has now reached epidemic proportions in the United States (as declared by the U.S. Surgeon General) and continues to increase. Obviously, awareness alone does not translate into correct and effective action.

According to the American Heart Association:

Today, about one in three American kids and teens is overweight or obese. The prevalence of obesity in children more than tripled from 1971 to 2011. With good reason, childhood obesity is now the No. 1 health concern among parents in the United States, topping drug abuse and smoking. Among children today, obesity is causing a broad range of health problems that previously weren't seen until adulthood. These include high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and elevated blood cholesterol levels. There are also psychological effects: Obese children are more prone to low self-esteem, negative body image and depression. For 6-11 year old children, the prevalence of obesity increased from 4.0 percent in 1971-74 to 18.0 percent in 2009-10. The prevalence of overweight in adolescents ages 12-19 increased from 6.1 percent to 18.4 percent [1].

So, with all that is seemingly harmful with the fast food diet, why do people-more notably children and adolescents-continue to make fast food "a part of their day"? Part way through the documentary, the covert strategy of "brand implanting" which the fast food industry employs was exposed. Also, people today are just so busy (overworked and overwhelmed); even if they know what is best to do diet-wise, they seem to be quite willing to sacrifice some health for some convenience.

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN: 2576-4004

Following the protagonist's plight in this video is certainly not a study in scientific methodology. There were other obvious pitfalls as well. Spurlock did not appear to be engaging in any regular exercise (other than a bit of walking). And, although Spurlock came across as a benign individual, the concurrent filming of a documentary certainly must have added resultant stress. Throw in travel, hotel rooms, and all the rest; these factors, in addition to the fast food diet could have exacerbated the adverse outcomes.

Another bullet point of the documentary was well made: that fast food may (barely) pass as food, but may well be as much poison as it is food. It is dolefully clear that a large percentage of the population seems to define food simply as "stuff you can put in your mouth, chew, and swallow" (sans emesis). This is a substandard definition, the consequences of which are being played out with tragic results everyday in the individual lives of children and adolescents and society as a whole.

Conclusion

If, during consultation or follow-up, the pediatrician (or other healthcare provider) senses that a patient may be ensnared in the fast

food trap, it may be time to recommend a strong dose of *Super Size Me*. This classic documentary might do as much to "treat" obesity as any medicine or therapy, and deserves to be considered as adjunct therapy for obesity.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that this paper was written in the absence of any commercial or financial relationship that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Recommended Viewing

The following is a link to *Super Size Me*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0IP3McBKso>

Reference

1. Overweight in children. American Heart Association. 2014.