The effects of junk-food on teenagers

French writer
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---» What is junk food? Where does the attraction for junk food come from?

Junk food is a term used for any food item that is perceived to be unhealthy or to have poor nutritional value. For example, it includes hamburgers, pizzas, candy, sodas and all those food products known for being loved particularly by teens. In fact, if you read the list of ingredients of a food item, and you find sugar, salt or fat as a principal ingredient, you can consider this food item as a junk food product. Its nutritional value is typically very high in low-value calories (same energy content of any other calorie but lacks accompanying micronutrients such as vitamins, minerals, ...). Some scientists have shown that we could even consider junk food as a real drug: an addiction. Indeed tests were conducted upon rats: a rat that used to eat healthy food (diet without sugar), gets more anxious and shows all the symptoms of an addiction to a drug if we add sugar to its meals.

So, why is junk food so popular among teenagers, when we know of the unhealthy ingredients that are present in junk food products?

Junk food remains popular because it is relatively cheap to manufacture, easy to purchase and convenient to consume. Many junk foods are convenient in that they have very long shelf lives and often don’t require any kind of refrigeration. But the main reason why teens love eating junk food is the high amount of flavor they find in it, because of its typically high fat, sodium, or sugar content. But that is also the reason why this type of food has so many negative effects on health.

Effects of junk food on health

The most common illness resulting from consuming junk food is obesity: a condition in which the natural energy reserve, stored in the fatty tissue of humans and mammals, is increased to a point where it is a risk factor for certain health conditions or increased mortality. Actually, there are more people who die because of a bad diet than because of tabacco. Moreover, in the short-term, eating junk food leads to a lack of energy and poor concentration, because of the empty calories it is composed of. And of course, it increases dangerously cholesterol rates which can provoke arteries obstruction and all the diseases linked with.

Illustration: Supersize Me This film is a documentary that follows a man, who decides to eat only McDonalds food for one month, to demonstrate the negative effects on the organism of following a junk food diet. He visits several doctors over the month including: a heart surgeon, a GP, a psychologist, and a nutritionist. In the end, this man becomes depressed, develops diabetes and gains thirty kilos in 30 days.
The effects of junk-food on teenagers

How to prevent the negative effects of junk food?

In England, junk food was banned in school meals: school dinners will be free from chocolate, crisps, fizzy drinks and “low-quality” meat beginning in the autumn, the government has announced. The emergence of “healthy junk food” such as diet soft drinks and low fat crisps are not enough to slow obesity down.

The fat tax: It is a tax on calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods. It has been proposed as one means to address the obesity problem. Indeed, the consumption of junk food is supposed to decline if it becomes more expensive. The revenue from the tax would be used to promote healthy nutrition and anti-obesity programs. It is estimated that a national tax of 1 cent per 12-ounce soft drink, would generate 1.5 billion dollars annually, and a national tax of 1 cent per pound of candy, chips and other snack foods would generate revenues of up to 314 million dollars! Because of course, we can see that food costs are out of balance: healthy food products cost more than unhealthy ones!

We can expect this plan to work because the same measures were introduced for alcohol and tabacco which has resulted in a decline in drinking and smoking. Another measure to prevent children and teenagers from the negative effects of junk food that was proposed by the English government, is to ban junk food adverts from popular programs and programs that are susceptible to be watched by children or teenagers under sixteen. The most important in preventing negative effects of junk food is a good education as far as food is concerned. The parents have to struggle against the junk food and most particularly with teenagers.

Conclusion: Finally, junk food is a real societal problem, that concerns most wealthy countries. Now, governments and world nutritionists are trying to stop this plague.

Russac Sandra  Jakubiec Louise  TS9