# The Junk Food Crisis

# 

## Introduction

The use of junk food in the United States and other parts of the world is alarming because such type of food is connected with the health risks. Heart disease is identified by health experts as the leading killer disease in the United States of America and is closely linked with poor diets (Robbins 5). Various scholars try to explain why people continue using them despite the knowledge in the public domain about the health risks of junk foods. For instance, Ross-Flanigan in her study is bothered about the eating disorder, and advocates for an active engagement of the public to address poor eating habits that expose people to junk foods (Ross-Flanigan 12). Gidney, on the other hand, illuminates the way junk foods are promoted in schools despite an effort to deal with the menace (Gidney 39). It implies that the fight against junk food is a tough one, but the good news is that it can be won. This study examines different research works on the problem of junk food to inform the readers about some of the existing remedies that they can adapt to avoid the health risks associated with junk food. It also climaxes some of the efforts the stakeholders such as the government and health experts can undertake to save the public from the problem of junk food, which is on the high rampancy.

## Thesis statement

Even though people are aware of the health effects of junk food, they continue using them, and this means that the government and health experts should work more vigorously to deal with this matter since a big number of people are exposed to information promoting fast foods more than healthy foods.

## Research Questions

1.      What are some of the health effects of junk food?

2.      Why do people consume junk food even if they are aware of their health risks?

3.      What are the risks of junk food on human growth and development?

4.      What should be done differently to deal with the problem of junk food in the contemporary society?

## Research Background

The consumption of junk foods is thriving higher in the United States and other parts of the world. Yet to be demonstrated in this study, the continued use of junk foods among children and adult is exposing the society to health risks, which means it is a problem that should be addressed at the right time. For example, the problems of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cognitive problems are associated with the consumption of junk foods (Harris and Graff 219). It is apparent in this milieu that the government must multiply its efforts in dealing with the problem of junk foods, lest a lot of money would be spent taking care of unhealthy generation. This research addresses the risks of junk foods, why people continue using them even though they know that they are unhealthy, and also, the remedies to deal with the challenge of fast foods in the society. One of the things to note is that junk foods are easy to access these days. As a result, many people are exposed to junk foods. Another thing is that they are cheap and sweet. Due to this, many people are addicted to them and are unable to resist them. Another thing to note is that the information about junk foods is supplied in the public domain compared to the information about healthy foods. This means that the government in conjunction with the health experts should act with speed to deal with it, so as to save people who are seriously habituated to junk foods.

## Study Methods

Importantly, this study vastly relies on the existing research works to inform the findings presented herein. The existing information helps to enlighten people about some of the physical health effects associated with junk foods. This is done with the objective to address the audience to adopt a healthy living style to save the government and the public from saving large amounts of money in treating chronic infections that are caused by unhealthy diets. It is important to note that the articles and scholarly sources used in this study are credible and inform the audiences about the effects of junk foods, and the reasons why they should be discouraged in the contemporary society. Using existing information is similarly important to identify the research gaps that should be addressed in regards to the effect of fast food in the society. More importantly, the sources used in this study are properly acknowledged according to intellectual property requirements. The study is significant in addressing the research questions and addressing the intended audiences concerning the need for them to partake in the fight against junk food, which affects the society today.

## Junk Food and Health Effects

Junk foods have far-reaching effects on human health.  In fact, it is not something new in the public domain. Several pieces of research and studies have made it profound that processed foods and fast foods are responsible for childhood obesity, diabetes, heart infections and other chronic illnesses. On the same pedestal, Thompson (40) pointed out that exposing young children is dangerous, something that affects them holistically. On the study, Thompson indicated that besides affecting their physical health, it also affects their mental health, which in turn would be a deterrent to their class performance in school. Research shows that people who consume junk foods perform poorly on cognitive tests, in regards to attention, mood, and attention. In other words, eating junk foods deteriorates memory. Toxic or poor diet is not fine for health since they trigger some chemical reactions that promote the inflammation in the hippocampus zone of the brain, an area associated with special recognition and memory. Foods like cheeseburgers, chicken nuggets, and chips are unhealthy, but people seem to be addicted to them that besides their side effects, they are sold in the restaurants and other outlets and people buy them daily.

Another thing to note is that foods high in sugar, as well as fat, affects the way chemical activities in the brain work, which in turn makes it highly dependent on such foods, which would also be referred to in other terms as addiction.   In this regard, junk foods increase stress and depression. When consumed for a long time, junk foods lead to the loss of amino acid tryptophan, which leads to the feeling of depression (Owen BJ, et al 965). In addition, an imbalanced ratio of fatty acids in the body similarly increases chances of depression among many people. This may explain the reason for many cases of suicide in the contemporary society. From this understanding, it is essential for the stakeholders like the government and health experts to work in unity to save the generation that would be ruined by the rampant consumption of junk foods. Just as evident in this study, people are aware of the side effects of junk foods, but they continue existing in the stores where they are bought. However, people spend a great amount of money to treat diseases caused by junk foods. For example, bariatric surgery used as a therapy for obesity is costly and only the rich people can afford (MacDiarmid et al. 636). Also, the federal government of the united states allocates billions of dollars on health bill to take care of people with chronic infections like cancer, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. When many people in the country adopt healthier diets, the large amount of money spent on medical care to chronic infections would be used in other development projects. Therefore, the public needs more information to act live healthily.

## Why People Consume Junk Foods, yet Aware Of the Health Risks

The greatest question that this study endeavors to answer is why people continue eating junk foods, even if they are aware of the risks associated with them. The study by Gidney is shocking in the manner public schools could make secret arrangements with the beverage companies to continue selling junk foods to the children (Gidney 39). Despite efforts by the parents, teachers and the government to adopt policies geared to promote healthy diets, but the companies continued supplying the unhealthy meals to the said schools. This is a common problem, to not only schools and similar institutions, but in the public domain too. For instance, shops, restaurants, and cafes use some tricks and tactics to influence the public to buy fast foods. A study by Bradshow points out the effects of Junk Food Marketing (JFM), which employs tactful means, appealing techniques, and strategic marketing, which are geared to address the demands of people of different ages (Bradshow 4). Most of the foods advertised through this method have low nutritional value and continue to affect the generations. According to her study, Bradshow points out that the consumption of junk foods increases every time people see these enticing adverts. In fact, the companies producing the junk food spend sufficient amount of money on such adverts, which make them more exposed to the market.

Another reason is that junk foods are cheap and easy to prepare. This is a common problem among the developing countries. When the price of traditional foods like maize, wheat, and rice goes up, they switch to the western style foods as their alternatives, but the bad news is that they are high in sugar, salt, fat and other chemicals that make them unhealthy. Notably, junk foods stocked in many developing countries led to a cultural shift, where people stopped using their traditional foods and adopted the western style-processed foods. For examples, countries like Kenya that relied on their traditional diets of grains like sorghum, millet, and traditional vegetables to the American processed diets such as fizzy drinks, cookies, and sugary cereals. Another thing is associated with the time spent in work, which constraint time for many people. During lunchtime, people rush to cafes, restaurants, and order fast foods, which appear to be tasty and cheap. In the evening, many people reach home when tired and want things that would not consume a lot of their time. They buy and prepare unhealthy foods and serve them to the family since they take very little time to prepare. This explains the reason why junk foods are consumed despite the knowledge about their side effects. In addition, junk foods are sweet and addictive, hence many people find themselves so habituated to them even if they know they are bad.

## What Should Be Done

It is so alarming that junk foods continue to place people at higher risk of an unhealthy society. Today, the United States of America is struggling with obesity in both children and adults. It means that if the problem is not addressed at the right time that the government in the near future would be spending a huge amount of money on health care for its sick people. In this regard, there is a need for a concerted effort from the government and the health experts to continue informing the public about the health effects associated with fast food (Ross-Flanigan 18).  This should not be assumed since the continued trend is affecting the society immensely. On the same note, the government should come up with radical measures to deal with the problem of fast foods in the United States of America. For example, a vegan diet should be encouraged in the society for a healthy future of Americans. A plant-based diet is healthier, safer, cheaper and good to address the world hunger. Therefore, there is a need for more effort from the government and the public to promote a healthy lifestyle in the United States.

Another approach would be to lower the incentives that the companies processing these junk foods are enjoying. The government can levy a heavy tax on the junk foods, and use that money for the promotion and supply of healthy foods. Levying heavy taxes on the junk foods would make them expensive and discourage many people from buying them. In the United States, $33 million is spent on advertising and promoting fast foods, whereas only $1 million is spent in promoting healthy foods. This shows that there is a great competition between fast food and healthy foods in approaching the public with awareness. The information about junk foods is more in the public limelight compared to that of healthy foods.  It means that when more levies are vested on fast food, more money would be available to create awareness about healthy foods. In fact, this would encourage people to go for healthy foods more than they do to fast foods.

Another tactic would be to introduce the study of cooking healthy foods in school so that children are more grounded in promoting healthy lifestyles. It can be made a compulsory credit course so that young people are more informed about promoting a healthy lifestyle in the society. They should also be properly informed about the way eating unhealthy diets would affect their general success in their studies (Bradshow 3). Another thing to do is to label the products that contain combinations of unhealthy materials so that people limit them. Just the same way some products like alcohol and cigarettes have warning against excessive consumption, it should be indicated in some products about the ingredients of excess sugar, salt, and fat so that people can make an informed decision when buying them. Another thing to do is for the local authorities to discourage the promotion of such food products in their localities. For example, the former first lady, Michelle Obama fighting against childhood obesity introduced new nutrition standards to schools as an enterprise of her “*Let’s Move*” initiative (Guidice 2). Through this, the first lady sought to see schools give healthy diets to children to promote their healthy growth. As a result, the public should be more informed and see the sense in campaigning junk foods out of their areas.

## Conclusion

This study obligates the government and health experts to maximize their efforts in dealing with the problem of junk foods to support a healthy generation. It is apparent that people access fast foods easily than they access healthy foods. Another problem is that the companies processing and supplying fast foods are more vigorous in their campaigns that those promoting healthy foods. These with other reasons explain why many people continue consuming junk foods even though unhealthy. That is why this study promotes high levies on junk foods to discourage people from buying them. This is so because this study establishes that fast foods are cheap and easily accessible. When levies are increased, they would be expensive to discourage people from accessing them. More importantly, the campaigns against junk foods in favor of healthy foods should be more profound. This is necessary to save the government from saving huge amounts of money in taking care of unhealthy people in the near future. On the same plinth, this study is significant in pointing out these facts so that the readers can be more informed in the need to discourage junk foods for a healthy society.

## Works Cited

Beth Bradshow. *Junk Food Marketing – a Crisis in the Marketplace | Food ...* Food Active, 1

Dec. 2016

Carter, Owen BJ, et al. "Children’s understanding of the selling versus persuasive intent of junk

food advertising: Implications for regulation." *Social science & medicine* 72.6 (2011): 962-968.

Gidney, Catherine. "'Nutritional wastelands': vending machines, fast food outlets, and the fight

over junk food in Canadian schools." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* , vol. 32, no.2, 2015, p. 391+. *Academic OneFile*

Guidice, Rachel. “Why Have Michelle Obama's Healthy School Meals Been

Junked?”

Harris, Jennifer L., and Samantha K. Graff. "Protecting young people from junk food

advertising: implications of psychological research for First Amendment law." *American journal of public health* 102.2 (2012): 214-222.

MacDiarmid, Jennie I., et al. "Sustainable diets for the future: can we contribute to reducing

greenhouse gas emissions by eating a healthy diet?–." *The American journal of clinical nutrition* 96.3 (2012): 632-639.

Robbins, John. *The food revolution: How your diet can help save your life and our world*.

Conari Press, 2010.

Ross-Flanigan, Nancy. *"*Eating disorders." *The Gale Encyclopedia of Science ,* edited by K. Lee

Lerner and Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, 5th ed., Gale, 2014.

Thompson, June. "'Junk food' at age three years may impact on school attainment." *Community*

*Practitioner* , vol. 81, no. 9, 2008, p. 40.