It is late on a Friday night, and you are driving home from work feeling famished. Suddenly, you see those Golden Arches protruding up in the night air, and your mouth starts to water. Visions of juicy hamburgers, crispy French fries, and buttery apple pies start dancing in your head. The drive-thru has cars wrapped around the building, but you wait your turn and super-size the order. With bags full of hot food in hand, you are now ready to head home. The scenario is a typical one that many people experience every day. Fast food restaurants dominate the American landscape, so individuals do not have to cook or even shop for meals anymore. The popularity of fast food restaurants stems from the fact that they are fast, cheap, and convenient. Unfortunately, people do not seem to take into consideration the effects of a fast food eating lifestyle. Fast food restaurants can have negative effects on one’s health because people are developing food addictions, becoming obese, and developing coronary heart disease.

Fast food is very addictive. It is hard to ignore the smells of salty and fatty foods that are in the air when you get out of your car at the mall. Flavor enhancers and colorings are used to make fast food appealing to the consumer. Three key ingredients that are believed to make this type of food addictive are salt, sugar, and fat. When all three are combined in food, substances are triggered in your brain to make you crave this type of food more and more. The addiction can become enhanced when other flavor enhancers are used. Monosodium Glutamate, for example, is a concentrated salt added to foods to enhance their flavor. The fast food industry uses a lot of
this flavor enhancer because it has a very low cost and helps to mask the flavor of cheaper cuts of meat. Studies have shown Monosodium Glutamate can interfere with appetite suppression.

So, even after you finish that super-sized meal at your favorite fast food restaurant, you still feel hungry. Casein is another example of an ingredient added to fast food. It has been referred to as the “nicotine of fast food” (Cardiff). The fast food industry transforms this protein compound into a refined and concentrated form to be added to concentrated milk solids. Some fast food items that contain this addictive casein ingredient are French fries, buns, and milkshakes. Casein is also the addictive property found in cheese. The cheese on hamburgers just adds to the addiction of wanting more fast food (Cardiff). When these addictive ingredients of salts, sugars, and fats are consumed in excess, another negative effect on health occurs in the form of becoming obese.

Fast food establishments have doubled since 1970. Consequently, approximately thirty-three percent of adults and nineteen percent of children are affected by obesity (Mutel). Fast food contains almost no nutrients, and it is highly processed with salt, fat, and additives. All of the additives and preservatives replace the fiber and nutrients found in the food. The beneficial nutrients that are lost can no longer help the body ensure proper digestion. Anything the digestive organs cannot process is often stored in fat tissues contributing to the development of obesity (Rose). The empty calories found in fast foods are also very high. McDonalds’ Big Mac, for example, contains five hundred and forty calories. Burger King’s Whopper contains six hundred and seventy calories, and Wendy’s Bacon Double Deluxe contains eight hundred and eighty calories. It is very easy to take in fifteen hundred calories in just one meal at a fast food restaurant (Muntel). Fred Milsaps, a manager at a local Wendy’s stated, “A combo number 3, the Triple Cheeseburger, contains approximately nineteen hundred calories. That includes the
cheeseburger, a large fry, and a large drink” (Milsaps 2013). The sad fact is that the general caloric recommendation is between fifteen hundred and eighteen hundred calories. You have just had your calories for the day in one meal! The additional calories that you consume the rest of the day will just lead to weight gain (Muntel). Another negative effect of eating at fast food restaurants is the increased likelihood of developing coronary heart disease.

There are approximately 1.2 million heart attacks and deaths from coronary heart disease every year in America. Trans-fats are the major culprit for this disease. Trans-fats are formed when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil. The process converts the oils into semi-solid fats. Fast food restaurants love to use trans-fats because it increases a product’s shelf life, adds stability during the deep-frying process, and enhances the flavor of baked items. The major sources of trans-fats include deep-fried foods, bakery products, margarines, crackers, and packaged snack foods (Cromie). I have seen the use of trans-fats first hand at the fast food restaurant I work at. When cooking on the grill, we have to clean it regularly to keep it free of black carbon, blood, and the greasy fats that stay there. After a rush period of an hour and a half, we accumulate a lot of the combined products in a grease bin, producing a massive blob of fatty leftovers. These fatty leftovers are clogging arteries, and causing major health problems. Waller Willet, head of research at the Harvard School of Public Health, stated, “The adverse health effects of trans-fatty acids are far stronger on average than those of food contaminates or pesticide residues, which have in some cases received considerable attention. Furthermore, trans-fats have no intrinsic health value above their calories” (Cromie). By reducing or eliminating trans-fats from fast food, think of the lives that might be saved from the deaths that occur from heart attacks each year. Willet stated, “Ten to nineteen percent of the coronary heart disease in the United States could be averted by reducing the intake of trans-fats” (Cromie).
Fast food restaurants have made American’s lives easier when it comes to meal preparation. The fact that these restaurants are fast, cheap, and convenient leads millions of people to stand in lines for their food every year. Consequently, the negative effects of developing food addictions, becoming obese, and developing coronary heart disease can be detrimental to your health. So, the next time you see those Golden Arches shining brightly in the night sky, keep driving. It could lead to a longer and healthier life.
Works Cited


