

Fast and Processed Foods Consumption and Health

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Abstract: Fast-food consumption has become a phenomenon of significant proportions, witnessing a remarkable surge in prevalence over the past few decades. The ubiquity of fast-food chains, characterized by their accessibility and affordability, has contributed to a significant shift in dietary patterns worldwide. The study assessed fast and processed foods consumption and health. It was revealed that the surge in fast-food consumption is not merely a dietary choice but has broader implications for public health. It has been associated with an increased risk of non-communicable diseases, including obesity, cardiovascular issues, and metabolic disorders, thereby posing substantial challenges to global health. As societies increasingly adopt fast-food as a staple in their diets, understanding its global prevalence becomes crucial for formulating effective public health strategies. The study concluded that the idler our stomachs are, the longer they will last. The more we tax our stomach, the soonest it will wear out. Take time and prepare your own food. Do not kill yourselves by running to the store and buying processed fast foods to eat. We need to change our focus and become more respectful of the human body as the true house of the living God. There is no house on earth more holy than this wonderful magnificent structure created by the Lord of the Worlds. We ought to clean it up

Keyword: Fast and Processed Foods, Consumption and Health

Introduction

The incidence of fast food culture among the various segments of the Nigerian society is on the rise. In developed countries, fast food had been implicated in the etiology of cardiovascular diseases. Today, our young people are surviving on junk foods. The youths are weak and poisoned by the intake of food prepared by merchants of death; masters of chemistry, who colour food to make it look better, they also inject hormones into meat to make it grow bigger and faster; use pesticides to kill the insects, which poison the earth. All of these actions result in a harmful effect on the human body.

Eating a quarter pound of hamburger, a serving of French fries (potato chips), and a milk shake presents the body with an artery-clogging 156 teaspoons of grease. Nigerians are increasingly being presented with meals that promote life threatening diseases (Otemuyiwa & Adewusi, 2023). Evidence keeps mounting that a diet built around whole-plant foods is superior to a meat-based diet. Meat is high in fat and cholesterol. It also lacks the fiber found in grown foods. In populations around the world vegetarians are known to have better health, are thinner, and live longer (Aounlttamod, 2020).

The current and popular diet of three processed meals a day with three processed snacks in between each meal is unhealthy. It is unhealthy because it consists largely of processed fast food and food that is overly processed in food factories. The foods get defibered, de-germinated, de-fatted, re-fatted, and manipulated in countless ways other than how food is intended for us to eat (Pole, 2014).

Globally, fast-food consumption has become a phenomenon of significant proportions, witnessing a remarkable surge in prevalence over the past few decades. The ubiquity of fast-food chains, characterized by their accessibility and affordability, has contributed to a significant shift in dietary patterns worldwide (Smith et al., 2020). The globalization of fast-food culture has transcended geographical boundaries and cultural differences, impacting societies across the globe. This surge in fast-food consumption is not merely a dietary choice but has broader implications for public health. It has been associated with an increased risk of non-communicable diseases, including obesity, cardiovascular issues, and metabolic disorders, thereby posing

substantial challenges to global health (Brown & O'Connor, 2020). As societies increasingly adopt fast-food as a staple in their diets, understanding its global prevalence becomes crucial for formulating effective public health strategies.

Fast foods, colloquially known as junk food, have become ubiquitous in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas, representing a notable shift in dietary patterns. This phenomenon, once considered foreign, has seamlessly integrated into the lifestyle of the Nigerian populace, raising concerns due to its alarming and seemingly uncontrollable prevalence. The proliferation of fast-food centers is a testament to the growing popularity of non-nutritious food consumption in Nigeria, with an increasing number of establishments opening almost daily across the country, especially in urban centers. This trend is documented in recent studies, such as Smith's (2021) exploration of the rapid rise of fast-food culture in Nigeria, highlighting the escalating concern surrounding this dietary shift (Smith, 2021). Another insightful perspective is provided by Okon (2020), who delves into the implications of fast-food consumption in Nigeria, emphasizing the health-related consequences of this unstoppable trend (Okon, 2020). These studies collectively underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive understanding of the factors driving this surge in fast-food consumption and the potential health implications for the Nigerian population.

In many cities in Nigeria, one can find numerous fast food restaurants where most of the foods sold are usually snacks, burgers, fries, chicken, cola drinks and ice cream. Fruits drinks and other foods that are high in fat, sodium and sugar. According to the study conducted by Adebayo (2020), fast-food restaurants have become ubiquitous in highbrow and downtown areas as well as semi-urban regions, contributing to the widespread adoption of fast-food habits among different segments of Nigerian society, particularly children, youths, and the middle class (Adebayo, 2020). With this, comes the unmistakably fast-food cultures that is rapidly evolving among the various segments of the Nigerian society, especially the children, youths and members of the middle class. The rich and middle class especially perceived the emerging fast food culture as a mark of high social status or a way of displaying affluence and high standard of living. The youth (18 to 40 years) which constitute a remarkable proportion of the Nigerian populace is the target group for the fast food industry. The concept of fast food eating has also expanded into food sales in schools. For many students the day is incomplete without visiting a fast food joint and most of the fast food restaurants in the cities have begun to open centers within and very close to schools especially university campuses. Some meals available for refreshment during celebrations, meetings and conferences are also now being prepared by fast food chains instead of the natural foods. Consumption of fast food has been linked-up to obesity and overweight status, and those who eat it have substantially higher calories, higher saturated and total fat, higher carbohydrate, and higher added sugar and protein intake than their non-fast food consuming counterparts. In addition, those that ate in restaurants had a higher BMI than those who ate home cooked food.

Nutritionally, the fast food diet has been questioned by some health educators and nutritionist. Most fast food meals are high in protein (especially the meat and dairy products) but the major concern now is that they are also usually high in fat, sugar and sodium; thus contributing additional calories, excess body fat and increase body weight. Being overweight or obese increases the likelihood of suffering from cancer, coronary heart diseases, diabetes, hypertension, osteoarthritis, strokes and obesity reduces life expectancy by an average of nine years. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the year 2003, taking note of the report of Medical Research Council (MRC), confirmed that fastest foods are very dense in calories and that a small amount taken can bump up calorific intake. They also found that these energy dense foods can fool people into consuming more calories than the body needs because of the satisfying taste. The MRC concluded that diet high in fast foods will increase a person's risk of weight gain and obesity – even though they may feel that they are eating no more than they would if they ate natural meal.

The choice of fast food consumption is influenced by a myriad of factors, reflecting the complex interplay of individual preferences, lifestyles, and external influences. Firstly, convenience plays a pivotal role as people often opt for fast food due to its quick accessibility and time-saving nature in our fast-paced society (Smith, 2020). Additionally, the appealing taste and sensory experience of fast food contribute significantly to its popularity, with many individuals drawn to the palatable flavours, high fat, sugar, and salt content that characterize these meals (Roberts et al., 2020). Social factors also come into play, as the influence of peers, family, and cultural norms can shape one's food choices, including the inclination towards fast food consumption (Jones, 2021). Economic considerations, such as affordability and perceived value for money,

further impact the decision-making process (Green et al., 2020). Finally, advertising and marketing strategies employed by the fast food industry play a substantial role in shaping consumer behaviour, as persuasive promotions and branding can create a sense of desire and familiarity, influencing individuals to opt for fast food options (Harris et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that up to 25 percent of children worldwide consume fast food frequently or very frequently, and this increases to over 50 percent in the adolescent age group. This is consistent with results of previous studies, particularly those based on the USA and the UK. This study has also highlighted the unexpectedly high proportion of fast food consumption in both age groups in many developing countries, for which data have not previously been available. Reported fast food consumption is high in childhood and increases in adolescence. Compared with infrequent fast food consumption, frequent and very frequent consumption is associated with a higher BMI in children. This was the position of Braithwaite et al (2020) in a study to determine fast food consumption and body mass index in children and adolescents: an international cross-sectional study designed to investigate whether reported fast food consumption over the previous year is associated with higher childhood or adolescent body mass index (BMI). Secondary analysis was from a multicenter, multi-country cross-sectional study (International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Children (ISAAC) Phase Three). In this study, parents/guardians of children aged 6-7 completed questionnaires which included questions about their children's asthma and allergies, fast-food consumption, height and weight. Adolescents aged 13-14 completed the same questionnaire. A general linear mixed model was used to determine the association between BMI and fast-food consumption. The results of this study reported that 72 72,900 children (17 countries) and 199,135 adolescents (36 countries) provided data. Frequent and very frequent fast-food consumption was reported in 23 percent and 4 percent of children, and 39 percent and 13 percent of adolescents, respectively. This cross-sectional study concluded that one-quarter of children and half of the adolescents consume fast food frequently or very frequently. Additionally, there was an association between a high frequency of fast food consumption and higher BMIs in 6-7-year-old children, but this association was reversed in adolescents. As this is an observational study, causality cannot be proven; however, it provides evidence that among children from many different nations, fast food consumption may contribute to weight gain.

In another study to determine the effects of fast food consumption on nutrient intake among Nigerian elite in Lagos, Nigeria, Otemuyiwa and Adewusi (2020), investigated the effect of fast food consumption on the quality of food and nutrients intake among Nigerians. Anthropometric measurement and 24 hours dietary recall were obtained from 254 subjects (127 male and 127 female). Fast foods were analysed for nutrients by chemical methods. The food intake was converted to nutrients by multiplying average food consumed by its content of nutrients; the result was compared to RDA and correlated to anthropometry. Key findings from this study revealed that, average energy intake per day was the same for both sexes at 12 MJ contributed 50:38:12 percent by carbohydrate, fat and protein, respectively, 60 percent subjects consumed more than the daily energy requirements and the consumption was reflected in the Body Mass Index (BMI). There was a positive correlation between energy intake and weight of the subject. Iron, zinc and protein intake were adequate, sodium was high while calcium, potassium and fibre intake was low. Choice of milk, fruit and vegetables were generally low compared to sweetened soft drinks. The study concluded that consumption of fast food by Nigerians could compromise a healthy diet.

This study is aimed at exploring the influence of socio-cultural factors and economic status on choice and frequency of fast food consumption, frequent fast food consumption on health outcomes and as well as how proposed policy recommendations aimed at promoting healthier dietary habits influence the patterns of fast food consumption within Uyo Local Government Area.

Selection Suggestions (Optimal Foods)

Fruits: All fresh fruits (avocados and olives sparingly).

Vegetables: Vegetables, green, herbs and squash.

Legumes: All beans, peas, lentils.

Tubers: Potatoes, yams, sweet potatoes.

Grains: All whole grains, bread, pasta.

Nuts: Eat sparingly only.

Optional Foods (If you feel you must use them)

Diary: Non-fat milk, plain yogurt, slim milk, cheeses, buttermilk, and low fat cottage cheese.

Eggs: Whites only.

Meals: Small amount if you insist. Skinless fowl, fish fillet, lean beef.

Most high-fat foods are loaded with cholesterol, which injures the linings of arteries. It is crucial that we cut down on the fat in our diets. Butter, margarine, cooking and salad oils are nearly 100 percent fats. The body responds by sealing off these damaged spots with extra cells. In the presence of excess fat and cholesterol, more and more band-aids are added, one top of the other, until plaques are formed.

Where is the Fat?

Foods	Percent (Fat Calories)	Total Calories (Peer cup 80z)
<u>Visible Fats</u>		<u>Per Calories</u>
Butter, margarine	100	1900
<u>Invisible Fats</u>		
Peanut (Peanut Groundnut Butter)	80	1500
Nuts	75 – 92	800
Pork, Beef	85 – 80	500 – 800
Double Beef Whopper	60	970
Whole Milk	50	160
Ice Cream	70 – 80	350
Processed Cheese	60 – 85	450
Cream Cheese	90	850

Salt contains two minerals, sodium and chlorine. Sodium is the important one; every cell contains sodium; as do all body fluids. But while it is essential for body metabolism, sodium can also cause trouble. Excess sodium can stay in body tissues and hold extra water. This causes swelling, which raises the blood pressure, which in turn increases stress on the heart. Salt preferences are not inborn, saltiness is a learned habit, and eating salty foods fuels the craving. Salt masks natural flavours. Shake of the habit by seasoning with herbs and spices. Give yourself three weeks. After that, even so-called normal foods will begin to taste salty. For the diehards, use salt substitutes (Fard, 2016).

Excess fat in foods is probably the most damaging component of the diet. Reducing the amount of fat, we eat is essential. Butter, margarine, cooking and salad oils, meat, cheeses, eggs, and whole milk all must be limited (Rauber et al., 2018).

The New Four Food Groups
 (Recommended by the Physician’s Committee for responsible Medicine)

Food Group	Servings Peer Day	Serving Size
Whole Grains	Five or more	½ cup of hot cereal, One dry cereal One slice of bread.
Vegetables	Three or more	One cup raw, ½ cup cooked.
Legumes	Two or three	½ cup cooked beans, One or two medium pieces of fruits, ½ cup cooked or ¼ cup dried fruit.

Some Processed Foods (Infant Food)

Food	Salt (mg)
Apple Pie (1 slice)	500
Canned Chili and Beans (1 cup)	3,000
Minute Rice (1 cup)	1,000
Wheaties (20z)	1,850
Frozen Pasta au Gartin (1 cup)	2,750
Potato Sauce (70z)	3,500
Tomato Sauce (½ cup)	1,950
Canned Tomato Soup (1 cup)	2,200
Corned Beef (30z)	2,360
Cheese (2 slice)	2,050
Fried Chicken (3-piece meal)	5,600

Overly processed food eating is a dietary pattern that used to be uniquely foreign but has gradually become part of the lifestyle of people in Nigeria. Overly processed foods and drinks include package breads and buns, sweet or savory packaged snakes, sodas, sugar drink, meat balls, poultry and fish nuggets.

Overly processed food generally refers to the products that have undergone excessive processing, leading to the removal of natural nutrients, flavor and textures which contain high level of unhealthy additives and sodium. Most of the processed foods are high in protein and fat thereby, contributing additional calories and increase body weight. Being overweight or obese increases the likelihood of suffering from cancer, coronary heart disease, hypertension, osteoarthritis and obesity reduces life expectancy by an average of nine years (Insel, 2020).

When a woman is pregnant, what she eats and how she eats results in the formation of what is growing inside of her (Eyo, 2021). Good Faddism refers to the unusual pattern of food behaviour based upon a magnified belief in the effects of food or nutrition on health and diseases. Food faddism is an important factor that causes malnutrition. It also refers to the unreasonable or exaggerated beliefs that foods or supplements may cure disease, have special health benefits, or promote weight loss. Some in the scientific community comment that; food faddism is born of ignorance about basic scientific dietary facts, and the evidence supporting weight loss is enhanced by anything other than calorie restriction. A faddist is a person obsessed with certain behaviours or subjects typically for a short time, and eventually prey to undisciplined and disproportioned enthusiasms, like buying everything needed for fulfilling the cravings without critically questioning the need to have it on a long-term.

Conclusion

The idler our stomachs are, the longer they will last. The more we tax our stomach, the soonest it will wear out. Take time and prepare your own food. Do not kill yourselves by running to the store and buying processed fast foods to eat. We need to change our focus and become more respectful of the human body as the true house of the living God. There is no house on earth more holy than this wonderful magnificent structure created by the Lord of the Worlds. We ought to clean it up.

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