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Study: Fast Food Clusters Near Schools

The big Burger King sign across the street from a high school campus advertises this temptation: "2 Whoppers for \$3."

The scene is repeated throughout Chicago, where fast-food restaurants are clustered within easy walking distance of elementary and high schools, according to a study by Harvard's School of Public Health.

The researchers say the pattern probably exists in urban areas nationwide and is likely contributing to the nation's obesity epidemic.

"It can be very hard for children and teens to eat in healthy ways when they're inundated with this," said lead author Bryn Austin, a researcher at Harvard and Children's Hospital Boston.

Nearly 80 percent of Chicago schools studied had at least one fast-food restaurant within a half mile.

Statistical mapping techniques showed there were at least three times more fast-food restaurants located less than a mile from schools than would be expected if the restaurants had been more randomly distributed, the researchers said.

Austin said Chicago was chosen because some of the researchers had previous expertise in the city, and she noted that Chicago has a diverse population that likely reflects what is happening in other urban areas.

Previous studies have shown that almost one-third of U.S. youngsters eat fast food, and

that when they do, they consume more calories, fats and sugars and fewer fruits and vegetables than on days when they don't eat fast food, researchers said.

The findings beg the question of whether fast-food companies intentionally locate their restaurants near schools to make them easily accessible to young people, some of their key customers, Austin said.



"We know that a great deal of thought and planning goes into fast-food restaurant site location," and that children "are very important to the market," Austin said.

McDonald's Corp. spokesman Walt Riker said the fast-food giant locates its restaurants "in high-traffic areas like every other business, to serve customers. It has nothing to do with schools."

He called the study assumptions speculative since the researchers didn't assess whether proximity of fast food affected students' eating habits.

If students were to take advantage of the Whopper special outside the Chicago campus, it would lead to a sizable calorie and fat intake.

Two "Original" Whoppers have 1,400 calories -- over half of them from fat, according to Burger King's Web site.

Government nutrition guidelines for children aged 4 to 18 recommend a daily total of between 1,400 and 3,200 calories, depending on age, gender and activity level,

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Harvest Blend Regular

- Red Cabbage
- Baby Carrots
- Hass Avocado
- Yellow Squash
- Roma Tomatoes
- Green Kale
- Spinach
- Red Beets
- Jonagold Apples
- Bartlett Pears
- Bananas
- Kiwi
- Valencia Oranges

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

You Don't Say

"Vegetarians have wicked, shifty eyes, and laugh in a cold calculating manner. They pinch little children, steal stamps, drink water and favor beards." - J. B. Morton

"Vegetarianism is harmless enough, though it is apt to fill a man with self-righteousness." - Sir Robert Hutchinson

"Everybody's a pacifist between wars. It's like being a vegetarian between meals." - Colman McCarthy

"I am not a vegetarian because I love animals; I am a vegetarian because I hate plants." - A. Whitney Brown

"A vegetarian is a person who only eats side dishes." - Gerald Lieberman

"A salad is not a meal. A salad is a promissory note that there's going to be steak!" - John Pinette

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and that no more than 35 percent of calories come from fat.

The study was released in the September issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

The researchers compiled 2002 data on 613 fast food restaurants and 1,292 public and private schools in Chicago. Sources included Technomic Inc., a food industry market research company that publishes a list of leading fast-food chains. Restaurants and schools for which addresses could not be found were excluded, but the researchers said the report includes at least 90 percent of both.

An estimated 16 percent or more than 9 million U.S. children aged 6 to 19 are seriously overweight or obese, numbers that have tripled since 1980.

Children in Chicago are more than twice as likely to be overweight

when they enter kindergarten than children elsewhere, so the study is especially troubling, said Dr. Matt Longjohn, executive director of the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children.

One solution is to "change demand" and make healthy food choices more accessible, Longjohn said.

Chicago's public schools are among districts that have eliminated junk-food and soft drinks from campus vending machines in an effort to tackle the problem, but the researchers said the clustering of fast-food restaurants near schools may be undermining those efforts.

"We can't really tell our students not to go to fast-food restaurants; all we can do is to educate them about what healthy food choices are," said Mike Vaughn, a spokesman for Chicago's public schools.

Recipes

Beans & Kale

- 4 cups cooked white beans
- lemon juice to taste
- salt, pepper, red pepper flakes to taste
- 1 bunch kale
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 onion

Mix beans, lemon juice, salt and peppers together. Heat gently and mash slightly. Chop onions and garlic. Sauté until garlic golden. Slice the greens into shreds and add to garlic onion mix. Sauté until greens wilted.

Lemon Sesame Glazed Kale

- 1 bunch kale
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lemon, zested
- 2 tsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 tsp red pepper flakes
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds

Remove any large stems from the greens and wash them thoroughly; do so in a sink with at least 5 inches of water. Moving the leaves around in the water and allowing them to sit for a few minutes to allow the sand or dirt to fall to the bottom of the sink. Once clean, roughly chop the greens.

Heat a large 13 by 11-inch roasting pan set over 2 burners on medium heat. Once hot, add the olive oil. Add the garlic, lemon zest, lemon juice, honey, salt, and pepper and stir to combine. Add the greens and saute for 4 to 5 minutes, tossing continually. Add the red pepper flakes and the sesame seeds. Toss to combine. Adjust seasoning, if needed. Serve immediately.

Pickled Roasted Beets

- 1 bunch medium beets, cleaned with 1-inch stem remaining
- 2 large shallots, peeled
- 2 sprigs rosemary
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 large red onion, frenched
- 1 cup tarragon wine vinegar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Kosher salt
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cup water

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. In a large bowl toss beets, shallots, rosemary and olive oil. Place into a foil pouch and roast in the oven for 40 minutes.

Remove the skin from the Roasted Beets and slice thinly. Arrange in 1-quart jars alternating layers with the onion. In a small pot boil the rest of the ingredients and pour over the beets. Tightly lid the jars and place in the refrigerator for 3 to 7 days before serving.

Home of the Braised (Cabbage)

- 2 tbsp canola oil
- 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and cubed
- 1 pint unfiltered apple juice
- 1/4 tsp caraway seeds
- 1 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 head of red cabbage, shredded

Heat the canola oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the apple to the pan and cook until lightly browned. Increase the heat to high and add the apple juice, caraway seeds, salt, pepper and cabbage to the pan. Cover the pan and shake to toss the cabbage to coat. Reduce the heat to low and cook for 20 minutes.