

Full text

Students examine fast-food meals, obesity connection: [All Edition]
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Abstract (summary)

Samuel Hirsch is the trial attorney representing the teenagers. He and his clients appeared on a recent edition of the "Dr. Phil" show, and Dr. Phil was less than sympathetic to their problem. "Oh, what a load of crap! I don't know how many grams of fat are in a [cheeseburger], but I'd have to be a moron to not know that it's fattening," said Dr. Phil. (Actually, there are 70 grams of fat, 1,210 calories, and 1,830 grams of sodium in a Whopper sandwich from Burger King, and that's without the cheese.) Dr. Phil went on to comment, "Is anybody forcing you to buy this for your child? Arguing that it's the seller's fault that you're driving to the restaurant up to twice a day is not a good argument in trial."

In a recent survey conducted at John Bapst Memorial High School, 100 students were asked, "How many times a week do you eat a fast-food meal?" The results: The average high school student eats fast food four times a week. Catherine Gels-Birch is a nurse who works at the Diabetes, Endocrine and Nutrition Center of Eastern Maine Medical Center. "That's shocking," says Gels-Birch, who feels that McDonald's should put nutrition labels on their food, but does not believe that fast-food restaurants are responsible for people's obesity.

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Editor's Note: Student Union is written by students at Hampden Academy, Brewer High School, John Bapst Memorial High School, Old Town High School, MDI High School, Ashland Community High School and Schenck High School in East Millinocket. The weekly column is a joint effort among the schools, the Bangor Daily News and Acadia Hospital. Today's column was written by a John Bapst Memorial High School student. Her adviser is Lynne Manion.

It's Tuesday night. You've just left work, and you're hungry. Lately, it seems like going home to cook a healthful meal is not considered an option. What will you eat? Fast food. The salty, tasty, fatty food made just how you like it because they love to see you smile.

Obesity is a growing problem in the United States. To control this epidemic, health care professionals are looking into the many causes and consequences of this illness. Recently, much blame has fallen on the nation's fast-food restaurants.

The question facing the nation: Are these corporations responsible for the obesity that they cause or is it the responsibility of the consumer to know what will happen if they eat certain foods?

This question has resulted in a wave of lawsuits. These so called "Big Fat" cases emerged when two overweight New York teenagers and their families sued McDonald's Corp. for causing their obesity.

Samuel Hirsch is the trial attorney representing the teenagers. He and his clients appeared on a recent edition of the "Dr. Phil" show, and Dr. Phil was less than sympathetic to their problem. "Oh, what a load of crap! I don't know how many grams of fat are in a [cheeseburger], but I'd have to be a moron to not know that it's fattening," said Dr. Phil. (Actually, there are 70 grams of fat, 1,210 calories, and 1,830 grams of sodium in a Whopper sandwich from Burger King, and that's without the cheese.) Dr. Phil went on to comment, "Is anybody forcing you to buy this for your child? Arguing that it's the seller's fault that you're driving to the restaurant up to twice a day is not a good argument in trial."

So why are people buying this food? Fast food is not only convenient, it is inexpensive, and some say that it is a financial necessity to buy this cheap food. "How can someone refuse the dollar menu?" says John Bapst senior Josh Keefe.

One single mother points out that the toys at McDonald's target children, and this fun eating style makes it difficult for her to encourage her daughter to eat healthfully. And some are now arguing that this is akin to the controversy over Joe Camel: Target children as consumers of something that is potentially hazardous to their health.

Fliers with all the important nutrition facts on the food they serve are available upon request at McDonald's and Burger King. Both restaurants have Web sites, and on the Burger King Web site, an entire section is devoted to nutrition information. McDonald's does not offer this information on the Web. A local McDonald's representative said that she was unable to comment on any of these practices.

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When asked about fast-food restaurants' policies of targeting children with advertising, she responded, "They do a fair amount of marketing to children, but I also think that there's a parental responsibility to help their children to make healthy choices and introduce a well-balanced meal to their children."

So next Tuesday night, when you've just gotten out of work, and you're hungry, maybe you'll remember some of the consequences of eating for convenience. With this unhealthful food so readily available, it is now up to you, the consumer, to take your health into your own hands, and stop the trend of obesity in America.