



Don't Eat This Book: Fast Food and the Supersizing of America

Morgan Spurlock is an independent film director and screenwriter, known for the wildly successful (and Academy Award nominated) documentary *Super Size Me*, in which he attempted to demonstrate the negative health effects of McDonald's food.

In his documentary *Super Size Me*, Spurlock sacrificed his health and wellbeing to illustrate the dangers of a diet made up exclusively of fast-food. In *Don't Eat This Book*, a literary sequel to the hit documentary, he explains his experiment, detailing why he undertook it in the first place, and charting a map through the wily world of fast food politics, power, and pounds. With supersized wit and an extra-large order of unapologetic clarity, Spurlock analyzes America's obesity epidemic, its relation to the fast food industry, and how U.S. government agencies actually promote an industry that is contributing to ill health on a worldwide scale. Citing nutritional and medical experts, he paints a picture of the long-term health hazards associated with a high intake of fast foods, and provides a startling example by documenting his own rapid disintegration into exhaustion, mood swings, liver deterioration, increased weight gain and high blood pressure.

"Have we all become compulsive eaters? Are we all gluttons? Are we actually, physically hungrier than we used to be? Or will we simply eat more if you put it in front of us, whether we're really hungry or not? A study done at Penn State suggests the latter." (Page 23)

Of particular note is Spurlock's irritation with the fast food industry's denial that its products are more harmful than healthful. He – and other experts that he cites – suggests that, like the tobacco industry, Fast Food is insidiously manipulating

"Dr. Erik Steele, a physician and hospital administrator in Maine, recently wrote: 'In the debates over how to fight the obesity epidemic in America, the food industry is acting a lot like the tobacco industry did in the tobacco wars. The parallels between the two industries are striking. Both spend billions of dollars trying to get us to use more of their products and then deny any responsibility for any ill effects caused by the use or overuse of their products. Both have spent billions advertising directly to children, then denied responsibility for our children eating too much high fat and high sugar foods, or smoking. The two industries have said it is our job to be smart about what we put in our mouths, and then resisted efforts to get us the information we need to be smart.'" (Page 47)

its audience with clever logos, catch phrases and misleading advertisements. Spurlock's wisecracks bittersweeten an otherwise acerbic collection of statistics that sour the stomach. He points out, for example: Obesity-related illnesses will kill around 400,000 Americans in one year (almost as many as smoking), one of out every three American children born in 2000 will develop diabetes from poor dietary habits, and yet each day, one in four Americans visits a fast-food restaurant (though most nutritionists recommend not eating fast food more than once a month), helping to make french fries the most eaten "vegetable" in the country.

A supersized dose of fast-food reality, *Don't Eat This Book* also highlights the way out from underneath the health-crushing golden arches. He includes inspiring examples of schools that have worked for change, providing healthy (even student-grown) food in cafeterias and replacing soda and candy in vending machines with fruits, granola, 100% juices and water. In each case, the result has been positive: less violence on campus, better grades, and healthier students. There's even a list of resources that parents, teachers, and school administrators can use to affect such positive changes in their own communities.

In a time when America is dealing with obesity-related health care burdens to the tune of \$117 billion annually, books that don't sugar coat the hotly debated balance of personal and industry responsibility for health are desperately needed. *Don't Eat This Book* unwraps the dangers related to high consumption of fast food while suggesting alternatives that can turn an obese nation around. Through his self-inflicted

fast food experiment, Spurlock has shown that, indeed, “you are what you eat.” Yet he has also suggested that we “vote with our forks” by choosing more wisely how we feed ourselves and our children.

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