

ISSN 0974 3474



# **NIGERIAN SCHOOL HEALTH JOURNAL**

VOLUME 21 • NUMBER 1&2 • 2009

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# ADOLESCENT FAST FOOD CONSUMPTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTHFUL LIVING

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## Abstract

*The development of quality of life requires conscious and positive attitude towards safe living, healthy consumption and the understanding of individual responsibility in consumer health. Available evidences clearly suggest that adequate and quality nutrition is very necessary for adolescents to live a healthy life. The implication of fast food consumption on adolescents' health is analyzed in this work thus; dietary need of adolescents, why adolescent's prefer fast food and finally the implications of eating fast foods. The authors believed that adolescents should consider living a healthy life and not one detrimental to their health due to wrong dietary habit. Adolescents should therefore be sensitized and encouraged through health education to make the right dietary choices.*

## Introduction

Quality of life according to Wuest and Bucher (2003), is an overall sense of well-being, which means a healthy satisfying, meaningful and enjoyable life. The ability to live a quality life (overall sense of well-being) is therefore determined by the ability to experience the highest degree of satisfaction of one needs, goals, expectations and standard in life. This depends on the individual state of health. Health is the ability to live within ones self-concept of adequate physical and social pleasure, vigour and enjoyment of all bodily functions and the ability to coexist with other people in the society. It is the ability to determine quality of life a person enjoys through a balance between behaviour and presentation of diseases to attain a high level of wellness. Quality health cannot be attained only through medical prescriptions and cares rather than the individual modifications of factors associated with habits and lifestyle that can have adverse effects such as dietary patterns. Union of International Association (2007), attested to the fact that inadequate nutrition is self-evident cause of ill-health, and major contributor to the high death rate among infants and young children. Adequate food is an indivisible link to the inherent dignity and health of human persons and indispensable for the fulfillment of other human functions. What an individual eats goes a long way to determine his/

her physiological and social well-being. Inadequate nutrition lowers health and productivity and as well lessens effective pursuit of social values.

Healthy eating is about getting the right and adequate food. This means having a variety of food, which contains certain right nutrients needed by the body in the right proportion. The nutritional intake of the adolescents can have critical effect on their physiological and social health. Moronkola and Aremu (2004), in Smith (1998), stated that adolescence is a time of transition and includes important biological, social, emotional and cognitive changes that take place quite rapidly over a relative short period of profound changes and occasional turmoil. It is a period when growing people experience considerable acceleration in growth, which brings about complex nutritional need because of their continuous physical growth and development, as well as meeting the social demands expected of them.

Onwuama (2004) reported Gutierrez and Kings (1993) that some abnormal feeding habits in adolescents may include skipping of meals, snacking, eating away from home, consumption of fast foods and trying unconventional diets. This leads to over consumption of nutrients which may increase the rate of obesity. WHO (2000) revealed that overweight (obesity) increases the likelihood of suffering from cancer, coronary heart diseases, hypertension, osteoarthritis, stroke and reduces life expectancy by an average of nine years. However, adolescents consume more of the convenience and rapid consumption foods (fast foods) through restaurants, on streets and at schools where most of the foods sold are fries hamburgers, ice cream, snacks, soft drinks, cookies, donuts, pastries sausage rolls, chicken and other foods high in saturated fats and cholesterol, sodium and sugar. This is in relationship with the fast-pack lifestyles that demand instant pleasure and satisfaction of food desires among the adolescents. For these reasons there is increased demand on the number of times the adolescents feed on fast foods. Many of them cannot do in a day without visiting a fast food restaurant, joint or outlet.

Some meals and refreshments at homes, parties and celebrations, meetings and conferences are servings from convenient foods instead of traditional natural foods that contain adequate nutrients needed by the body for normal functions. Many adolescents enjoy fast foods consumption because the centers are usually avenue for leisure, sightseeing, entertainments, and socialization and as well give way to quick lunches and dinners and can be eaten on the run.

### **Dietary Needs of Adolescents**

Healthy food should contain moderate amount of meat, fish, milk and dairy foods, small or only occasional amount of food high in fats especially saturated fats, or foods and drinks high in sugar and salt. Balanced (adequate) diet involves at least three meals per day, in which the daily requirement of food classes (protein, carbohydrates and oil) content are needed.

Adequate diet is concerned with the intake of appropriate type and adequate amount of drink and foods to supply nutrients and energy for the maintenance of body cells, and organs and to support normal growth and development. It can also mean a well –balanced diet, which provides sources of energy and nutrition for optimal growth and development. Adequate nutrition is based on combining specified number of servings of food chosen from each of the four major food groups to receive all the required nutrients which are: (1) Bread and cereals groups; (2)Vegetables and fruit groups; (3) Milk and milk products group; (4) Meat, fish, poultry and beans groups.

Omedilla and Granado (2000) ascertained that adolescents have nutritional needs to maintain growth, development and complex interactions of genetic instructions. This opined to the fact that adolescent nutritional need can be subdivided into two categories. Firstly, micronutrient needs which are required to achieve satisfactory growth and development and maintain optimum health. Secondly, metabolic needs and disease prevention which are otherwise; maintained by the food that contain calcium in order to ensure proper building of bones, and prevent osteoporosis (bone disease) and skeletal fracture in later life.

Starchy food like bread, potato and cereals contain carbohydrates mainly in form of starch, which provides energy. Whereas protein, mineral, vitamins and fibers are nutrients needed for healthy body. Fibres help digestive system to function properly and prevent bowel disorder such as constipation. Whole grain foods like brown rice help to prevent the risk of heart disease and stroke, people including the adolescents need fruits and vegetables daily. Studies reveal that high intake of fruit and vegetables lower the incidence of heart disease. Also, fruit and vegetables provide the body with vitamins, minerals, fibres and carbohydrate in the form of sugar. Furthermore, the body needs protein for growth and repair of worn out tissues. Proteinous food provides B vitamins. Vitamin B12 is contained in meat, fish and egg and helps to produce red blood cells to keep the nervous system healthy. Proteinous foods also contain minerals such as: Iron, which helps to build healthy blood; Zinc, which aid wound healing; Magnesium, which helps the body to use energy.

It is important to eat variety of foods each day to keep the body in a healthy condition. Maintaining a healthy diet according to Wikipedia (2007) is the practice of making choices about what to eat with the intent of improving or maintaining good health. This usually involves consuming necessary nutrients by eating the appropriate amount from all the food groups, including adequate amount of water. It is important to eat a variety of these food groups each day to live a quality life since human body cannot remain healthy and be productive without varied nutritious diet. No one food supplies the entire essential nutrient in the amount needed. An individual will experience malnutrition if the appropriate amount of or quality of nutrient comprising a healthy diet are not consumed for an extended period of time. However the dietary need of the individual may

vary because of the complexity of human nutrition and individual genetic make up, environment and health status.

### **Why Adolescents Prefer Fast Food**

The rate at which fast food business and restaurants grow is very high because of the fact that fast foods are convenient foods and usually prepared in walk-in and drive through restaurants and are compatible with a fast-passed lifestyle and food desires especially by the adolescents. Fast food is attributed to the challenging lifestyle of increased independence and staying away from homes, academic stress in schools, busy schedules and the search for self-identity and peer group influence. Also, changing lifestyle has reduced the time for preparing meals at homes due to dual career and long working hours by mothers coupled with the fact that eating out has been associated with high prestige or high class value and as a lifestyle of the affluent.

Fox (2007) submitted that eating out is a ceremonial event where one can entertain oneself and others. He regards it as a special occasion marked by special dress and behaviour. Also some adolescents and even adults associate eating out and fast food today as prestigious lifestyle that can boost their social status and give good impression of their buoyant finances. As reported by Konwea (2007), Carroll and Miller (1982) stated that people enjoy fast food eating centres because it usually provides a place for socialization. This can otherwise entice people to consume more calories than the body needs because of their satisfying taste, attractiveness and group eating.

### **Implications of Eating Fast Food**

The nutritional intake of the adolescents can have critical effects on their physiological and social well-being. Adolescents consume mostly food that are rich in Saturated fats and Trans fats, sugar and salt. Such food found in meat and milk fat, Lard, butter, cheese, pastries, pies and cakes, have not so much benefits to the body. Eating too much of these foods may promote weight gain, destroy physical attractiveness and encourage heart disease and other common illnesses which may limit social involvement and enjoyment of life. Obesity can damage the body image and self-esteem thereby causing social anxiety and depression.

Food Standard Agency (2005) revealed that too much fat isn't just a factor in obesity, but Saturated and Trans fats may raise cholesterol level in the blood, and increase the level of heart disease. The Agency further revealed that more than half of 11-14 years old and two third of 15-18 years old adolescents have dental decay mostly due to the consumption of food high in added sugar such as soft drinks, sweet, jam, cake, ice cream, biscuit and pastries. Salt contain sodium chloride, which predisposes and causes high increase of the risk of developing high blood pressure and stroke.



Sambal's (2006) in eating theory gave the side effects of eating food substances thus:

1. Carbohydrate - increases weight gain if taking in excess and too little of it makes the body tired easily.
2. Protein - excess of it increases weight and may cause excess urine production, and inadequacy results in stunt growth.
3. Fats - little of it provides necessary Vitamins needed and excess of it induces weight gain.
4. Vitamins - keeps the body healthy but required in small quantity such as calcium, Iron, Iodine and Sodium.
5. Mineral salt - comes in different forms with different functions and needed in correct proportion for proper bodily functions.
6. Fibers - can be taken as much as possible for easy digestion and bowel function.

However, the body needs sufficient calories to maintain the metabolic processes and performs the daily activities, but should not be in excess or insufficient to avoid malnutrition. Malnutrition can occur when food is not adequately supplied to the body. Eating too little or too much of some food nutrients can result to negative effects on the body. Encyclopedia (2007); Wikipedia (2007) gave an array of afflictions ranging from stunt growth, reduced intelligence to various cognitive abilities, reduced sociability, reduced leadership and assertiveness, reduced activity and energy, reduced muscle growth and strength, poorer overall health are directly implicated in nutrition deficiencies, as well as rare effect of black spot appearing on the skin which are detrimental to physical attractiveness, which are as a result of unbalanced diet. All these can further cause problems with maintenance of body tissues, growth and development, brain and nervous system function as well as problem with bone and muscle system and normal functioning of the entire body system.

Konwea (2007) reporting Aladelokun (2006), says fast foods reduce the natural food nutrient (vitamin and mineral salts) that help to build the body and protect it against preventable ailments like diabetes, cancer, heart diseases, hypertension, obesity and cardiovascular diseases during processing due to too much subjection of food to processing, additives for preservation and artificial flavours.

Obesity in the contemporary culture is associated with many negative stereotypes and regarded as unattractive condition, unlike in the traditional society when it was associated with physical attractiveness and affluence. Nowadays, obese adolescents usually face heavy physical and social stigma from their peers. This condition is rapidly increasing among the adolescents and placing them in high risk of health hazards. Adeniyi (2004), in his submission said that the existence of different nutritional diseases like diabetes mellitus, obesity and heart disease that plague the Nigeria society, can be linked to the abuse and high rate of sugar consumption as well as the craze for sugary

foods by the young adults. In this regard, Kurtzweil (2007) agreed that because of the link between certain nutrients and diseases, a Daily Reference Value (DRVs) for some nutrients are desirable. This table he said is based on 2000 calorie a day for adults and children over 4 years only, in which the adolescents are inclusive.

The diagram me below can be used as a guide for the right choice of adolescents' daily menu.

#### Daily Reference Value (DVRs)

| Food Component     | DRV                 |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Fat                | 65 grams (g)        |
| Saturated          | Fatty acids 20grams |
| Cholesterol        | 300millgrams (mg)   |
| Total carbohydrate | 300g                |
| Fibre              | 25g                 |
| Sodium             | 2,400mg             |
| Potassium          | 3,500mg             |
| Protein            | 50g                 |

**Source:** Daily Reference Value (DRVs) Kurtzweil

#### Conclusion

Quality and adequate dietary habit makes life meaningful. Adolescents should consider living a healthy life to indulgence in a lifestyle that can be detrimental to their health from wrong dietary habits. The purpose for which food is needed by the human body is enough to make good and correct choices instead of allowing the negative effects of wrong choices on their body composition and disposition.

#### Recommendations

It is suggested that nutritional education be taught in schools and youth organizations to sensitize and encourage adolescents and enable them to have adequate knowledge on their dietary needs. This will enable them to live vibrant, healthy and fulfilled adolescence and adulthood life as they grow.

Fast food restaurants should device better methods of preserving natural food nutrients so as to prevent losses during preservation and processing. Natural food substances (like fresh vegetables and fruits) can be made readily available in form of garden within the vicinity of restaurants to be made use of when needed. Also, natural cooking ingredients such as pure groundnut and vegetable oil can used for cooking instead of the synthetic ingredients to allow easy metabolism. This will prevent excess additives and salt which can destroy some valuable nutrients during preservation and also reduce unnecessary nutritional side effects from diets.

Parents (mothers in particular) should make it a point of duty to always prepare the family meals rather than allowing her members to develop interest in eating out, notwithstanding the stress and time involvement. They should know and be able to prepare variety of dishes (menu), make it palatable, attractive and hygienic for general consumption. This will encourage other members of the family especially adolescents to have interest in preparing and enjoying their own meals rather than eating in fast food restaurants. This is because adolescents learn mostly and best from activities that radiates around them. Finally, adolescents should avoid consuming excess amount of calories and nutrients, but consider the Daily Reference Value (DRVs) as directed by Kurtzweil (2007) adequate for their daily menu.

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