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ELIMINATING THE JUNK OUT OF JUNK FOOD

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ABSTRACT

A Good Health is the real Wealth. Adequate nutrition in the food which you eat helps in reducing the risk of many chronic diseases and in turns helps you in keeping our body healthy. When you are in hurry and hungry too you would prefer eating fast food because of its well known characteristics like fast, tasty and above all convenient. Children love it and so do adults. But it also contains lots of calories, sodium, sugar and of course fat. Though it seems to be economical but if you opt for a good fast food restaurant and that too for a full family then it will affect your pocket more in comparison to cooking at home. But the question can you transform junk food or fast food into healthy food? This is the hardcore reality that it is very hard to follow a healthy meal plan if you are visiting and having meals at fast food restaurants on regular intervals. Fast food has very content level of saturated fats, trans fatty acids, sugar, sodium and calories. Not only this but also it tends to be low in nutrients and lacks fruits, vegetables and fiber. That does not mean you should avoid fast food completely. It's quite OK to have it once in a while, but so as to keep yourself healthy you cannot have it on regular basis. If you consume it regularly, it will be certainly giving ill effect on your health. The key is moderation, both in what you are ordering in fast food outlet and how frequently you are consuming that fast food. There are always options which can make your meal healthier than others. The study intends to identify the different ways, tips and menu recommendations which can help in transforming the junk food into healthy food.

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INTRODUCTION

With dual income pattern and upgraded standard of living, the eating habits are converting into fast food junkies, which are directly influencing the health side of our body. People are generally mouth watered on hearing the name of Pizzas, Burgers and Colas. But in other picture they are suiting to be unhealthy in our daily dietary intake. People have habitual of ordering fast foods and has become an everyday reality for the children to intake fried meals. A report by ASSOCHAM reveals that in metros about 86 percent of residents prefer junk foods and children take it as lunch during school times. Some experts says', this habit is just copying the western culture without analyzing our needs and environment. Fast food not only proves to be harmful for our body but it has high level of fat and sugar, it creates a vicious cycle and addictive to it making much difficult for the children to choose healthy food. The problem of obesity, heart disease, sluggish liver, uneven cholesterol levels are increasing rapidly due to unhealthy food habits. High content of trans fat in fast food predispose children to the risk of heart diseases.

Energy density of fast food is more than twice the recommended daily requirement for children. The intake leads to higher proportion of calories obtained from total and saturated fat. Moreover, the micro-nutrient like carotene, vitamin A, vitamin C is also low. Low level of calcium and magnesium contribute to osteoporosis and rich sugar diets lead to increased dental problems. People are increasingly being warned against the ill effects of fast food and the potential damage they pose to the human health. The effects of fast food include nutritional deficiencies, obesity, increased cholesterol levels, cardiac problems and many other threatening health hazards. Some precautions can be taken to control fast food eating habits. But this doesn't mean that we should stop eating fast food at all. If we become smarter and use our commonsense while selecting the menu then also we can somehow transform fast food into a healthy food and avoid eating the unhealthy part. As fast food are full of trans fats, sodium, sugar and other health affecting elements so if control or restrict their usage in food preparation then we achieve our goal.

Can you really eliminate junk out of junk food?

This is a fact that it is very difficult to follow a healthy meal if you are regularly eating the junk food or fast food items. But it

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does mean that you don't have options. You can follow some tips and can transform fast food into a healthy diet to some extent. If you are watch full to you following factors then you can achieve the desired results:

- **Pay attention to calories intake:** In today's scenario people have become more calorie conscious. This is the reason that most food chains put nutritional information of their menu items on the websites as well as at the franchise location. You should take advantage of this information and aim to keep your entire meal to 500 calories or less.
- **Choose items which have lower fat content and higher protein and fiber:** While selecting your dish you should order items with more good stuff, like high-quality protein, whole grains and fiber. Also keep in the mind the options that are relatively low in saturated fats. It's true that all saturated fats are bad for you, most of those found in fast food restaurants are.
- **Controlled intake of trans fats:** Small amounts of naturally-occurring trans fats can be found in dairy and meat products but it is the artificial trans fats which are used to keep food fresh, are dangerous to your health. You should avoid anything containing "partially hydrogenated" oil—even if it projects to be trans fat-free—or any foods which are cooked by deep frying. While no amount of artificial trans fat is considered safe, as per USDA guidelines the maximum of trans fat **2 grams per day**.
- **Keep a watch on sodium intake:** As per the American Heart Association recommendations the range of sodium intake that adults stay between is 1500 mg to 2,300 mg a day. This can be very tough to maintain if you are eating fasting food—intake of a burger and fries can easily exceed your daily limit.
- **Take your own add-on items with you if you really want a health boost:** Even if you order wisely, it can be difficult to get enough nutrients, vitamins and fiber from a fast food menu. But If you plan well in advance take your own healthy toppings like seeds, nuts dried fruit, carrot sticks, apple or pear slices, and yogurt etc with you then you can probably hope for a healthy boost.
- **Be cautious for added sugar:** The presence of added sugar is one of the biggest issues with the fast food products. This is not limited to desserts and drinks. Even a burger may contain 5grams to 10grams of added sugar and the same can be there in cookies. Ketchups, dips, sauces, salad dressings etc are also full of added sugar. Your body completes all its needs from the natural sugar occurring in food and the intake of added sugar will only add to weight and may lead to diseases like diabetes, depression etc.

As per the recommendations of American Heart Association the maximum intake of added sugar for men is 37.5 grams per day where as for women it is 25 grams per day. While that may look like a lot but the grams can quickly add up when you are eating junk food. This is clear enough from the below mentioned examples:

- A 12Oz soda have upto 40gms of added sugar where as a 64Oz may have about 200gms

- A medium shake contains 45gms of added sugar
- **McDonald's** Hot 'N Spicy Mc Chicken has 22 grams of sugar
- Starbucks Frappuccino contains 69gms of sugar
- A medium vanilla shake from Burger King contains 46.33 grams of added sugar

When you opt to eat at a fast food chain, try to plan ahead if possible and eat low sugar in the meals leading up to and following your fast food meal. You can minimize some of the damage by requesting salad dressing on the side, limiting ketchup, eating subs, burgers or sandwiches open-faced, and skipping dips or sides that are packed with sugar.

Ordering Healthier Fast Food Choices

Making healthier fast food choices is easier if you plan ahead by checking the nutritional guides that most chains post on their websites. But if you don't have the chance to prepare, you can still make smarter choices by following a few common sense guidelines:

- **Watch your portion size.** Many fast food outlets serve enough food for several meals that too in a single serving. Always take care of portion size of your order. Larger the portion size greater will be the ill effects. So go the items which are smaller in size. You can look into child centered menu as it is supposed to have smaller meal size.
- **Prefer grilled or roasted items.** While ordering items give preference to grilled or roasted food over the fried one. Avoid ordering processed meats like hot dogs, ham, bacon or sausages. Choose roast beef, chicken breast or turkey instead.
- **Customize your order.** Many junk food items may be made healthier with some small changes. So don't afraid to make smaller changes. For example you can ask for whole grain bread when you are ordering sandwich or you may opt wheat bun for your burger.
- **Read the description of the menu carefully.** Generally one line description of the dish is provided in the menu. Pay attention to it. Dishes which are pan fried, deep fried, better dipped, breaded, basted, creamy, crispy or au gratin are high in sodium, unhealthy fats and calories.
- **Don't go with the name.** You should not assume healthy sounding dishes are actually healthy. Food chain outlets use this technique to enhance the sales. For example many fast food salads are full of fried toppings, have unhealthy dressings and are a diet minefield. You should make sure that your salad fast food salad not a stealth diet saboteur.
 - Request for dressing to be served on the side so that you can manage your intake.
 - Avoid toppings which are unhealthy. For example: processed cheese, croutons, crispy noodles etc.
 - Skip taco salad. The use of deep fried shells, chips, cheese, and sour cream make it high calorie and high fat diet busters.
 - Go for for salads with grilled chicken, vegetables or shrimps. Don't order salads with breaded chicken or other fried tops.

Tips for limiting the Calorie intake

When you eat at a fast food restaurant your calorie intake will get boosted drastically. If you are to control your fast food calorie intake then you can actually achieve your goal i.e. make you junk food healthy. Following are some tips which can help in controlling the calorie intake:

- **Keep your eyes on condiments and dressings.** While selecting your order watch the items which are high in calorie. Items may have such salad dressing, spreads, toppings, sauces and side dishes etc which are full of calories. Oil based sauces like Mayonnaise add lots of calorie to the dish. Ask for mustard sauce as a substitute to mayonnaise or you may request for mayonnaise sachet so that you put it on your sandwich by yourself and control your intake.
- **Be careful when it comes to drink.** Soda based drinks are good source of hidden sugar and calories. The average soda drinks contain around 300 calories which is equivalent to 20 spoons of sugar. Shakes are even worse. They may have around 800 calories which is equivalent to 30 spoonful of sugar. Some outlets offer diet soda drinks, these are also not the good option, as they contain artificial sweeteners which may lead to weight gain. Same is the case with fruit drinks and lemonades. They also add lots of calories without giving much nutrients. Choose unsweetened tea or coffee or water instead.
- **Be intelligent while choosing sides.** Many food items are accompanied by side dishes such as rice, noodles, macaroni, fries, chips, biscuits, onion rings, coleslaw, cheese etc. These are packed with calories. Order dishes with light dressings, fresh fruit cups, corn on the cob, apple slices, baked potatoes etc.
- **Avoid bacon.** Do you really need bacon to add extra flavor in your salads and sandwiches? It may add taste but processed meat is high in fat and calories and has very nutrients. So avoid eating them. You can try ordering some extra pickle, onions, tomatoes, mustard or lettuce to add flavor.
- **Skip the French fries.** It's always tempting to order French fries along with sandwich and burger. But this makes your diet calorie packet. A burger or sandwich alone is sufficient enough for your tummy. So you don't require French fries along with burger or sandwich.

Healthier fast food menu options

When you think about fast food outlets, you will certainly have lots of option available, from traditional sandwiches and burger to café and donut chains and Mexican and Asian franchises. The menu of a fast food restaurant changes frequently as per the need and demand of the public and market. Competition and trends affect it a lot. So you should always keep your eyes open in order to look for new options available in your favorite fast food outlets. You can follow some nutritional guidelines which are based on commonsense to make the healthiest choices. In order to save yourself a lot dietary grief you can follow these tips:

- **Burgers:** Burgers are most common and widely eaten fast food items. A burger alone contains 1000 – 2000 calories particularly when served with cheese, potato patties. And if you add potato fries and a shake with it then it will be nothing less than a nutritional disaster. Everything that you add to your meal will count for its nutritional value.

Avoid/ Skip	Opt/ Substitute
French Fries	Side salad or baked potatoes
Double Patties Cheese burger	Regular, without Cheese, Single Pattie, fibers
Salad with toppings such as bacon and cheese	Green salad with grilled chicken. Dressing can be taken on side so that you can control the usage.
Chicken nuggets or tenders	Grilled Chicken strips
Milkshakes	Simple plain milk or fruit slices
Bacon, cheese, onion rings, and other calorie-laden burger toppings	extra pickles, tomatoes, or heart-healthy avocado
Larger Burgers	Stick to smaller portion size or Children menu

- **Chicken:** Ordering chicken from a fast food outlet can be a healthier option as compare to order burger or pizza. But you still need to be cautious while making your choice. Much of it will depend on method of cooking used. Grilled or roasted is healthier than battered, bread crumbed and fried.

Avoid/ Skip	Opt/ Substitute
Fried chicken, original or extra crispy chicken	Chicken breast without breading
Fried Chicken sandwich	Grilled Chicken Sandwich
Chicken and biscuit bowl	Mashed potatoes
Extra Sauces and gravies	Limiting sauces and gravies
Teriyaki wings or popcorn chicken	Honey Barbeque chicken sandwich
coleslaw, biscuits, baked beans, mac 'n cheese,	steamed vegetables, green beans, or corn
Fried or breaded chicken	baked, broiled, grilled, or roasted chicken

- **Sub Sandwiches:** Whenever you think of the word healthy fast food probably the first name which will come into your mind is sub sandwiches. There is no doubt that you may find many outlets offering health conscious sandwiches but they do have pitfalls. In a survey it is found that most of the people eat more calories at a sub shop than a McDonald's. This may be due to the reason that people become over impressed with the ads given by these sub shops and they take it as OK to order extra sodas, chips or condiments which transform their healthy menu into a unhealthy one. So even if you are eating so called healthy sandwiches then also you need to use your commonsense while making your final choice.

Avoid/ Skip	Opt/ Substitute
Large sizes or foot long sub	Small size or 6 inch sub
Processed Cheese	Avocado
Processed meat such as ham, bacon, meatballs, salami etc	Vegetables, Healthier cuts of meat like roast beef, chicken breast or tuna
white bread, French rolls, or cheese breads	Whole grain bread
Chips, Cheese and other fatty sides	Get something healthier on the side, such as an apple, a small side salad, or a yogurt
Mayonnaise and high calorie sauces	mustard, olive oil, or vinegar
Extra cheesy or high calorie toppings	Load up on veggies, such as lettuce, tomatoes, onions, olives, pickles, green and red peppers etc

- **Pizza:** Pizzas are full calories due to usage of fatty meats and cheese with little nutritional value. Pizza can't anyhow be considered as health food. The only way to transform it into a healthier one is to limit the portion size i.e. portion control. If go for just two slices that will be more enough and will add up to 600 calories, 12 gms of sugar and full day's worth of sodium. If you eat more than that then it will be near to impossible to stay within healthy limits of fats, sodium, sugar or calories.

Avoid/ Skip	Opt/ Substitute
Regular crust, deep-dish or pan pizza	Thin crust pizza
Eating whole pizza	Order by slices
Meatballs, bacon, or sausage toppings	Prefer chicken or steak
Garlic bread or "cheesy" bread	Plain rolls, breakfast sticks
garlic knots, mozzarella sticks, and cheesy bread	Skip the sides
Heavy toppings	tomato, peppers, mushrooms, spinach, artichoke, garlic, onion, and broccoli
Mozzarella cheese	ricotta cheese

- **Asian Food:** Asian fast food seems to be healthier than a burger or pizza or sandwich. The main reason is the use of more vegetables. But if you are not attentive, you can end up with a meal that's much higher in sodium, fat, calories, and added sugar. If you're intelligent enough in choosing what you eat, you can minimize the diet busting damage.

Avoid/ Skip	Opt/ Substitute
Deep-fried starters like egg rolls, tempura, fried wontons, etc.	Soup like egg drop, miso, wonton, or hot & sour soup
Battered or deep-fried dishes like sweet and sour pork, chicken etc	Stir-fried, steamed, roasted or broiled dishes chow mein chop suey
Sweet and sour sauce or regular soy sauce	Hot chili sauce or low sodium soy sauce
Fried rice, white rice	Steamed rice, brown rice
Fried Asian noodles	small portions of lo mein, chow mein, and chow fun, or avoid them altogether

Conclusion

Fast food items are really tricky when you're conscious about your weight or your health. Finding a well-balanced and healthy meal in the fast food outlets is a big challenge. But this doesn't mean that you can find good options. You can always find out healthier options among these diet disasters. You just need to know where to look and how to order. Try to keep your entire meal to 500 calories or less. Most chains post nutritional info both on their websites and at the outlet. You should take benefit out of this information. Look for foods which are higher in fiber and protein lower in fat. Opt for items with good amount of fiber, whole grains, and high-quality protein. Also go for menus that are relatively low in saturated fats. And avoid or skip of all those items which contain trans fats. If you really want a health boost you can take your own add-on items, healthy sides and toppings like nuts and seeds, dried fruit, root vegetable sticks, apple or pear slices, and cottage cheese or yogurt etc.

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