

Do You Think You're Healthy?

Super Size Me Discussion

Introducing Super Size Me

Super Size Me is a documentary that raises a lot of issues related to nutrition and environmental influences on individuals' choices.

This documentary follows Morgan Spurlock as he eats at McDonald's for an entire month with three simple rules:

- 1) No options: he could only eat what was available over the counter (water included!)
- 2) No super sizing unless offered to super size
- 3) No excuses: he had to eat every item on the menu at least once

Spurlock took up this challenge following the unsuccessful lawsuit against McDonald's in which it was ruled that eating at McDonald's did not cause the plaintiffs' obesity.

During this "McAttack", Spurlock also put his own body on the line. He gained 24.5 lbs in 30 days and 7% body fat. He developed high cholesterol levels, high uric acid levels, and high blood pressure. He suffered headaches, mood swings, chest pain, loss of libido, Mc'stomach aches, depression, and ended up with a sick liver.

Another factor that also contributed to his weight gain was decreased physical activity level. It is important to reinforce the importance of exercise for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

The documentary also explores school lunch programs, and declining health and physical education classes in schools.

Time: 1h 36 m



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Super Size Me Discussion Guide

After showing Super Size Me to your students, discuss or research some of the following:

Discussion Ideas

1. Why do people eat at fast food restaurants?
2. One of the reasons for eating at/ from fast food restaurants is lack of time for cooking dinner and eating together in our fast paced world. How can these challenges be overcome?
3. How would you describe your mealtimes at home? Take a few minutes to do this test.

Mealtime Matters

Circle the number of times last week that you ate dinner with all of the members of your household: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Check the obstacles that make it difficult for your family to gather for dinner:

- We're too busy
- Parent's work schedule
- Parent's schedule for meetings, exercise, other activities
- Kids' sports and activity schedule
- No time to shop
- No time to cook
- Don't know how to cook very well
- Family members don't like the same foods, so we eat apart
- Shared mealtime is unpleasant, so we avoid it

How can you promote positive mealtimes in your family?

4. Is it fair to point the finger at McDonald's? Where does corporate responsibility stop and personal responsibility begin?

Tip: Explore the role of corporations and the role of individuals in our society. Here are a few ideas for discussion:

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Role of Corporations

- Corporations only want to increase the number of consumers and profit. Clerk at counter offers super size option to Spurlock 9 times in 30 days: bigger super size portions of fries and sodas for little extra money.
- Globalization phenomenon: McDonald's is all over the world and everybody knows what/who McDonald's is. First graders in an Illinois school fail to recognize a picture of Jesus or George Washington but all identified Ronald the Clown.
- Some of the methods corporations use to lure consumers, mainly children and teens, are:
 - Play places
 - Birthday parties
 - Advertisements to teens (I'm loving it logo and jingle)
 - Advertisements to kids (Clowns, happy meals, cartoons, toys)

Role of Individuals

- Consumers think in terms of money and not in terms of their health. Why do they super size? Are they really adding value for their money?
 - People have less time to cook at home with their busy lifestyle.
 - Parents take their kids to McDonald's play places instead of going to parks, especially in neighbourhoods that lack parks.
5. Do you think the lawsuit against McDonald's was frivolous? Why or why not?
 6. Is healthy eating just a matter of good education? What are the factors that influence your food choices?

Some areas to explore could be:

 - Availability at school cafeterias
 - Ads
 - Cost
 7. Do you think your school cafeteria should offer French fries? Why or why not?
 8. Are there changes in food and beverage choices you would like to make at your own schools? What are they?

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9. Is it fair to confront fat people for how they eat? What about thin people like Don Gorske who are “super heavy users” of fast food? Is it the shape you are that makes you healthy or unhealthy? Or is it what you do (how you eat and how much activity you get) that matters?

Tip: Explore and refer students to the Council on Size and Weight Discrimination website for a perspective against weight discrimination.

<http://www.cswd.org/>

<http://www.cswd.org/discfaqs.html>

10. How much influence do you think the media has on the way you think you should look? How much influence do the media have on the food choices you make?
11. Can fast food be nutritious? Examine the nutrition information for your favourite fast food meal. How can you improve this meal?
12. How will this documentary influence your future food choices and perception of health?

Research Ideas

1. The documentary presented obesity data for the US. What is the situation in Canada?
2. What are the trends in Canada with regard to eating out? Eating out at fast food restaurants?
3. Review commercials on TV for an evening. What percentage are food commercials? Categorize the products advertised into food groups or convenience foods vs. fresh whole foods.
4. What are the health consequences of over-eating and under exercising?
Tip: Research type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease...
5. Can you be fit and fat?
6. Note how much easier it was for Spurlock to gain weight vs. lose weight. What is the success rate for weight loss diets? Is Jared Fogle's (the Subway spokesman) experience typical?
7. Family mealtimes provide an opportunity for families to eat together and have beneficial effects on children and teens. What are these benefits?