

When It Comes to Eating Junk, Once in a While is Most of the Time

When I used to work in an office, I would listen to young parents talk about their school age children. A common concern of the parent was their children's diet. Some expressed unease about the amount of junk food their children received in the classroom. On a student's birthday, some mothers would bring in a cake or cupcakes for the entire class. At first, it seemed insignificant – after all, children only have one birthday a year. However, at some point, sugary snacks were served for every student's birthday – including children whose birthdays occurred during the summer.

Eventually, it became a school issue. Many parents did not want their children constantly eating junk food. However, most parents saw nothing wrong with it, because, they believed that it only happened once in a while.

Recently, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that nearly one in three children eat fast food every day. While that may surprise most people, I frankly believed it would be higher.

Beyond school birthday parties, snack food, junk food, fast food, and every other possible combination of bad food seems to be standard in the American diet. And, while we should emphasize nutrition in our children's diet, the problem is shared by every age group.

Just think of our holidays, and the foods that we consume. During the fall and winter, we have Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year. Super Bowl parties are ubiquitous. Valentine's Day is a boom for the chocolate industry. In the spring and summer, we celebrate Easter or Passover, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day.

Throw in other birthdays, anniversary parties, retirement parties, family reunions, social gatherings, block parties, fairs, amusement parks, neighborhood barbecues, church functions, picnics, sporting events, going to the movies, and even funerals. We devour cakes, cookies, potato chips, ice cream, pizza, popcorn, hoagies, donuts, and soda at most of these occasions.

Offices where I worked had pastries, cookies, donuts, pies, and cakes in the break area nearly every morning. Some employees' breakfast consisted of two or three donuts washed down with a sugary soda.

Lunch proved no better as pizza, hoagies, pretzels, a bag of chips, French fries, and more soda was typical. True, a few people ate salads

with their lunch. However, with the added bacon bits, ham slices, croutons, and cheese, all smothered in a fattening, high-sodium salad dressing, the few greens in the salad all but disappeared.

Add in sweet or salty snacks in the late morning, the mid-afternoon, after dinner, before bedtime, and even late-night. Favorite TV programs and sports events make us crave “munchies.” I see people snacking while driving, walking the mall, walking their dog, on a smartphone or tablet, and at the gym during a workout. You are probably even eating a snack as you read this – come on, don’t deny it!

The traditional menu of breakfast, lunch, and dinner is essentially disregarded by most Americans. A Nielsen study reported that over 90% of Americans eat between meals. We eat when we want, where we want, and whatever we want. We enjoy sweet goodies, salty treats, spicy snacks, and fatty, fried morsels all day long. We ignore the quality of the food that we eat, and consume the tasty, addictive snacks that delight our palate instead.

There is nothing wrong with an occasional snack. Even the healthiest people indulge themselves once in a while. However, for the general population, “once in a while” has turned into “most of the time,” even though few of us realize it.

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