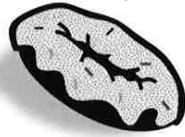




Super-Size Fast-Food Facts

by Sandy Stiefer



Fast foods can be a part of a healthy diet if you choose wisely. Start by avoiding super amounts of fat and calories.

Jeffrey and Gil walked into the Bigger Burger restaurant.

"Man, am I hungry!" said Jeffrey.

"Me too," agreed Gil. "I'm going to have the Super-Doooper Mammoth Burger." He reached into his pocket. "I have just enough money for a Super-Doooper Scooper of fries, too."

"That's a gut-buster," Jeffrey said with a laugh. "I want something smaller. I'm going to get a Super-Doooper cola and the Side-of-Beef burger. With lots of mayo."

"What are we going to do after we eat?" Gil asked.

"Digest the load and rest!" answered Jeffrey.

Fast food is not only fast, it's inexpensive, convenient, and tasty. Many kids could eat it for every meal. In fact, some people do. Gil and Jeffrey have fast food three or four times a week. The number of people eating fast food has almost tripled in the past 20 years. There are 300,000 fast-food restaurants in the United States alone.

And the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) says nearly half of all food dollars is spent on food eaten away from home.

Fat Food, Fat You

Fast food, however, doesn't rank high with health experts because of the fat and calories. We're all familiar with the burgers, fries, fried chicken, tacos, burritos, and roast beef offered by fast-food restaurants.

Part of the reason fast food tastes good is its high fat content. The fat makes the food taste and feel good in your mouth. Certain amounts of fats are important to a healthy body. But the fats in fast foods are often saturated fats in meat and fried foods. You should not eat too much of these kinds of fats. Kae Fenster, a dietitian, says there are ways to stay away from these fats and still keep your taste buds happy. And if you cut down the amount of fat, you'll knock out a lot of calories, too. That is because fat has more calories per gram.

Smaller Portions

"Choosing regular-size portions is a very good idea," Ms. Fenster says. If you go for the super sizes each time, you're probably taking on a super-size portion of fat and calories. There is also the sodium (salt) to think about.

The extra-large burgers and fries and other fast-food servings are far larger than a standard serving size as set by the U.S. government. The sizes of servings you get in most restaurants actually equal several "normal" servings.

Ms. Fenster suggests that if you really are hungry, you can add foods to those regular-size portions. "A salad with low-fat dressing, a glass of low-fat milk, or a baked potato with chili or broccoli and cheese gives us more to eat and some important nutrients, too," says Ms. Fenster. This is good advice because a typical fast-food meal is low in certain nutrients people need. According to the 2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans report, almost 90 percent of Americans need to improve their diets. For example, fewer than 20 percent meet the daily recommendation for fruits.

According to the National Institutes of Health, more than half the U.S. population is overweight. Fast food is not entirely to blame. People simply don't get the regular exercise they need to burn off the calories they take in. That leads to weight gain and even obesity (weighing 20 percent or more above ideal weight). Serving size certainly can play a part in the overweight picture. Every fast-food place has a larger-size option. If you order a combo or value meal, you get a big burger or sandwich, large-size fries, and large drink. For a few more pennies, you can get a bigger portion of fries or a huge drink. That may be a good deal for your wallet, but it's not so good for your waist! The extra-big sizes go beyond what is considered a normal-size serving. Here, for example, are the normal-size servings of food set by the U.S. federal government.

- Meat: 3 ounces of meat, chicken, fish (the size of a bar of soap)
- Bread: one slice of bread, a tortilla, or half a small bagel
- Cheese: 1 ounce (one slice of American cheese)

Fast-food restaurants aren't the only places where you should watch serving sizes. Many restaurants have large portions that are often equal to two to five normal-size servings of foods.

Not All Bad

"Fast foods are not 'bad' foods," says Kae Fenster. "Foods that are high in calories or fat or salt can be included in what we eat as long as we remember this: balance, moderation, and variety." If you eat fast foods often, you should make choices so that you're not always getting the high-fat and high-calorie meal. Here are ways you can eat healthier in fast-food restaurants:

- Skip the mayo, special sauce, and bacon. Use mustard and ketchup for flavor instead.
- Order the smaller size. Be aware of serving sizes.
- Choose grilled or broiled meat. Skip the fried burgers and breaded, deep-fried chicken and fish.
- Have a salad with low-fat dressing or a baked potato. You'll get more nutrients this way. Says Ms. Fenster, "If you really, really want some fries, get a regular-size order and split it with Dad or your friend . . . sharing is always fun."

Ms. Fenster also suggests balancing what you eat each day. If you do have a typical fast-food meal, balance the rest of the day with healthier, lower-fat and lower-calorie food choices.

Life is busy and fast. We want our food fast, too. But we don't need to gain weight that fast. Choose wisely when you eat fast foods. Unlike Jeffrey and Gil, you won't need to sit down and rest when you're finished.



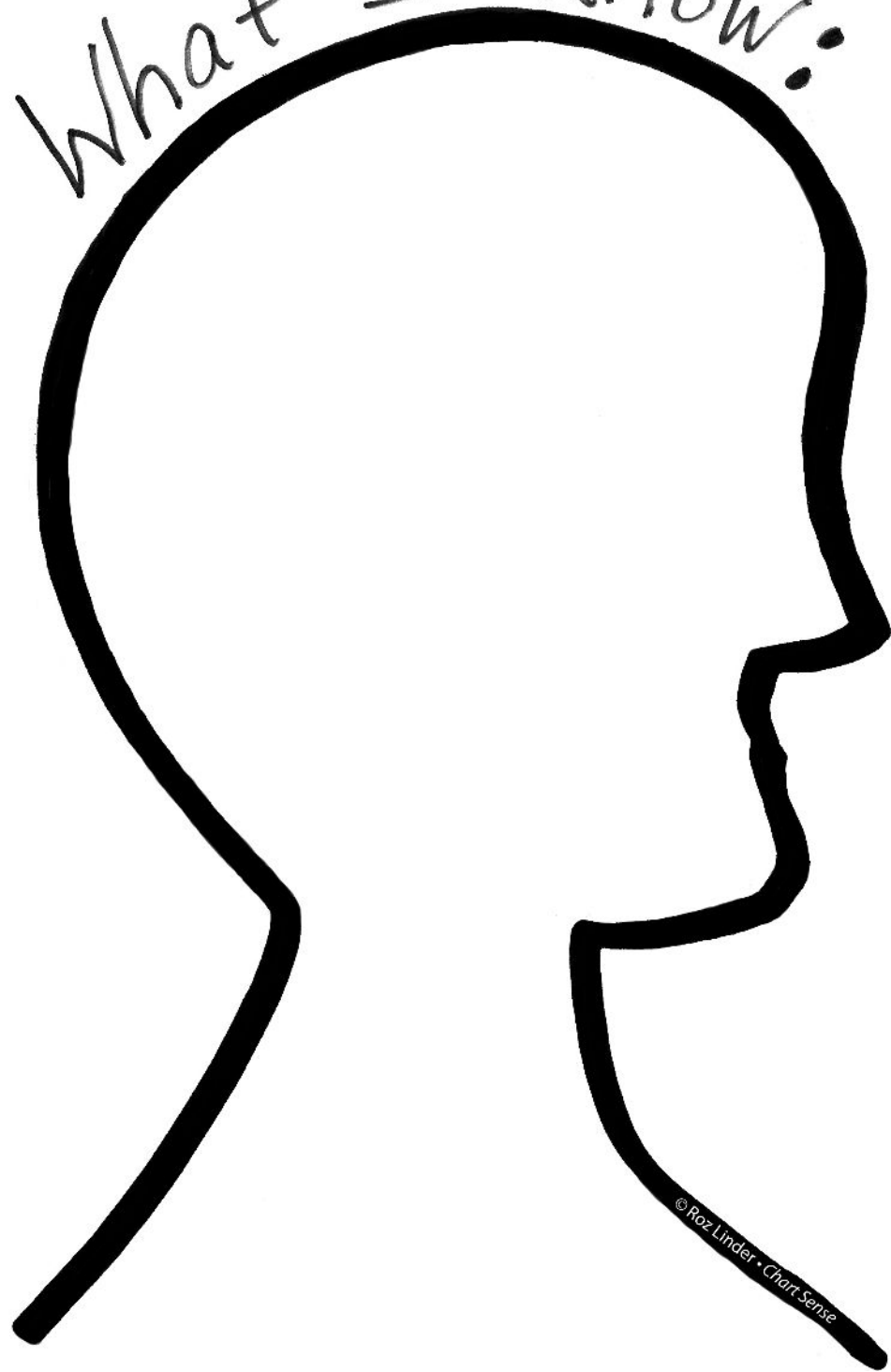
Make your own *Information-Thief* Mask



DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut out the mask above.
2. Tape one side of the mask to a long, sturdy object, like a pencil, straw, ruler, or wooden spoon.
3. When you lift the mask to your face, gently hold the unattached side with your extra hand.

What I know:



Why the U.S. census tries to count everyone

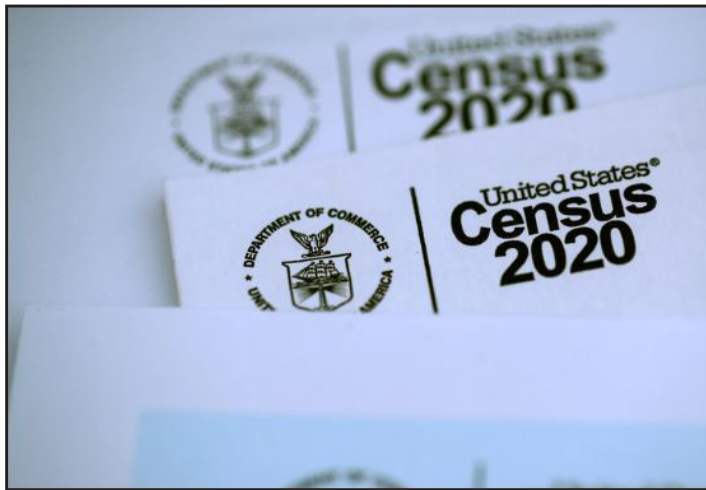
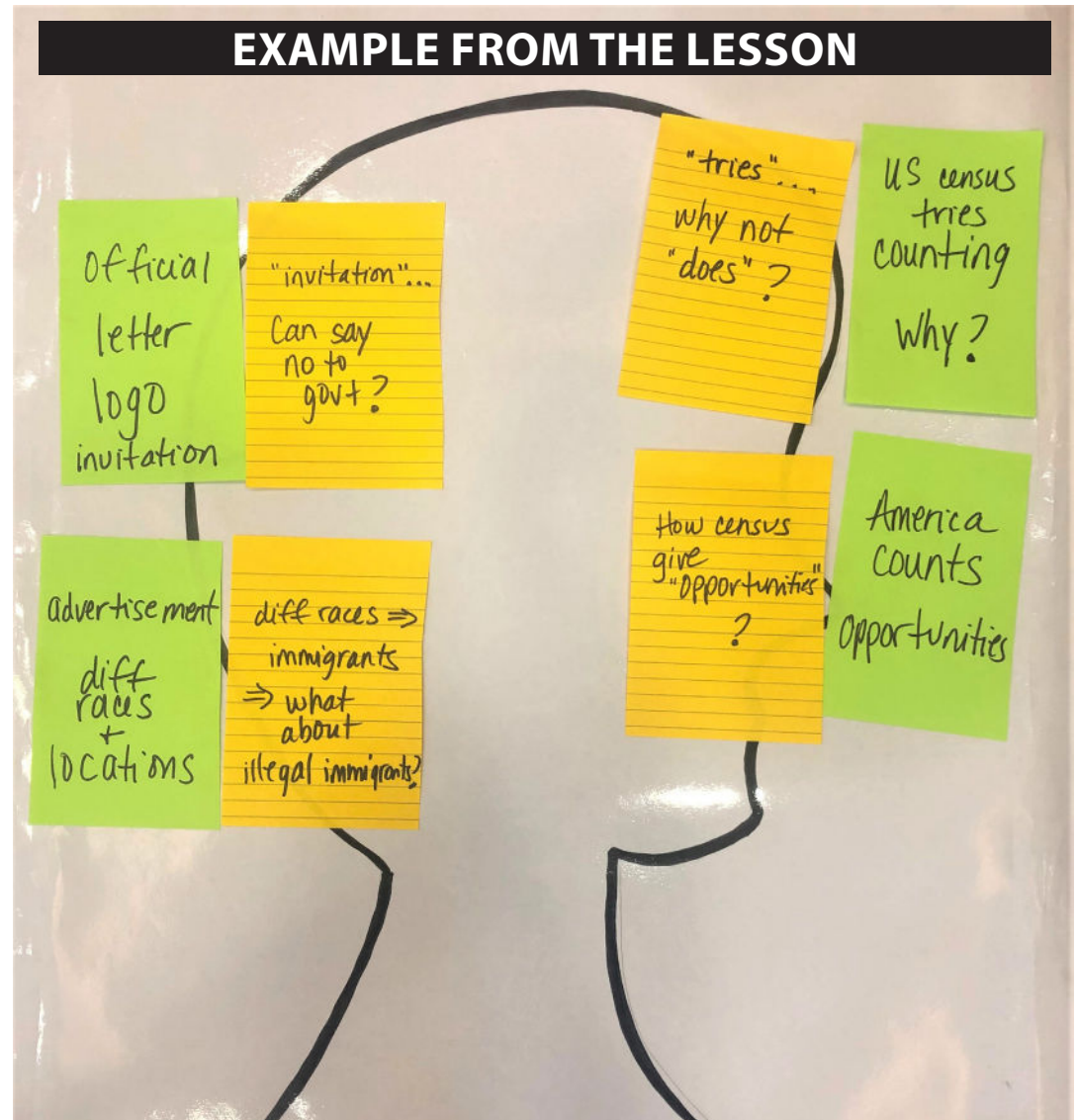


Image 1. The U.S. Census logo on paper gotten in the mail with an invitation to fill out census information online on March 19, 2020, in San Anselmo, California. Photo Illustration: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images



Image 2. Advertising that the U.S. Census Bureau used to encourage people to participate in the 2020 Census is displayed on January 14, 2020, in Washington, D.C. Photo: Michael A. McCoy/AP Photo



Vaccines are like giving your body's defenses a cheat sheet

Image 1. A girl gets a bandage on the spot where she just received a flu vaccine. Photo: Center for Disease Prevention and Control on Unsplash



Immune System

Protecting Against A Virus

Vaccines Make People Resistant To Disease

Coronavirus

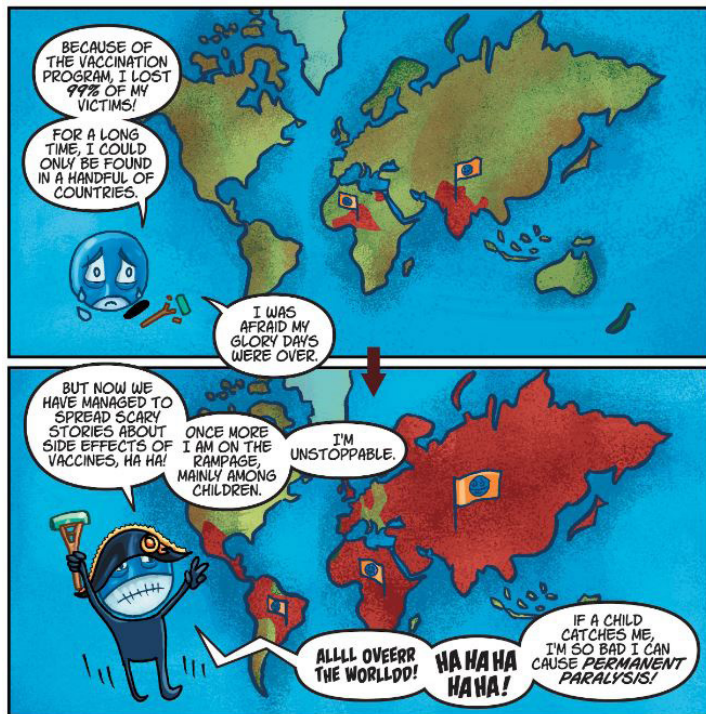


Image 2. Susan Nasif, an expert on viruses and an artist, helps educate kids about vaccines with comics. In this one, she tells a story about poliovirus, which paralyzed thousands of people before a vaccine was developed. Polio cases nearly disappeared until some people avoided the vaccine. Image: Susan Nasif

