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Eliminating fast food restaurants from around schools could reduce the number of obese children in the US
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Fast Foods Near Schools Prompt Poor Teen Eating Habits

The conclusion belongs to a new scientific study

Although researches done over the years have found no correlation between fast food restaurants near schools and the number of overweight or obese children, a new study, conducted by Christopher Carpenter, at the University of California at Irvine (UCI) and Dr Brennan Davis, at the Azusa Pacific University (APU) in California, showed that children attending school within a half mile of a fast food restaurant tend to be heavier and eat less fruits and vegetables than their peers in schools far away from restaurant chains.

Because their results were contradicting so many studies that came before theirs, Carpenter and Davis looked at numbers from the California Healthy Kids Survey, and selected some 500,000 children, from mid- and high-schools across the state. The original data was gathered for the period 2002 - 2005, and analyzed eating habits and body weight. Of those who were part of the new research, some 28 percent were overweight, and more than 12 percent were obese. Some 55 percent of them attended a school located within walking range of a fast food restaurant.

According to the results of the paper, published March 2008 in the American Journal of Public Health, children who went to school near fast food restaurants were heavier, on average, than their peers of the same background, ethnicity and age. They also reported eating less vegetables and fruits. On the other hand, they reported drinking larger numbers of sodas and other refreshing drinks, as opposed to other kids in schools further away than half a mile of fast foods.

Carpenter and Davis argued that the number of restaurants in proximity to schools made no statistical difference, meaning that having just one or ten fast foods yielded the same results. The researchers argued that the authorities needed to step in and implement measures aimed at making sure that this worrisome trend would decrease.

Thus far, the two identified only two possible options to this problem - offering children healthier alternatives to dangerous foods and making them more aware of the health risks these foods implied, or eliminating all fast food chains from around schools. The latter measure may seem drastic, but it has been successfully implemented in other countries as well, where obesity rates decreased notably.