

Healthwatch: Fast Food—Dangerous to Your Health

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We all know that a fast food meal of burger and fries or pizza is not the healthiest—especially for someone watching their weight. But, new research explains why these foods are even more dangerous to your health than just increasing your waistline.

A key study by Dr. James O’Keefe revealed that a meal of highly processed, calorie rich foods cause surges in blood sugar and cholesterol (specifically triglycerides). This surge of glucose and fatty acids immediately overwhelms the body, resulting in production of free radicals that trigger inflammatory changes in the arteries. Keep in mind that damaged arteries not only negatively affect the heart, but every other organ in the body.

On the other hand, foods such as those in the Mediterranean diet—whole grains, vegetables, olive oil, red wine (in moderation—1 glass/with a meal) can blunt this after meal surge of dangerous free radicals. Other foods that prevent a rapid surge of blood sugar and cholesterol are lean proteins, vinegar, fish oil, tea, and cinnamon.

This doesn’t mean that you can never enjoy a pizza or fast food meal, but consider moderating your intake of these foods to less than once weekly. Then take these steps to keep yourself healthy:

- Choose high-fiber, low-glycemic index carbohydrates (whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and berries). Eat lean protein at all 3 meals.
- Consume 1 handful of nuts per day (limit to 1 closed fist).
- Include 1 teaspoon cinnamon in your daily diet. Sprinkle it on cereal, fruit, or in beverages. Cinnamon minimizes the sugar surge in your bloodstream.
- Eat a salad of leafy greens with vinegar and olive oil on a daily basis. Vinegar (1-2 TBL with a meal) decreases the blood sugar surge by 25% and increases satiety.
- Avoid highly processed foods and drinks, especially those containing sugar and high-fructose corn syrup, white flour or trans fats.
- Keep serving sizes modest.
- Maintain a healthy weight (BMI < 28—click on link below to download chart) with a waist circumference less than ½ your height in inches. Abdominal fat is the most dangerous to your health.
- Get 30 minutes or more of daily exercise.