

Media Report**The health impact of a fast food diet: a movie review of “super size me” (2004)**

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"With this volume we introduce a new section of the journal and welcome its editor, Yusef Progler. Media Report will feature a book, film or other media review about health and medical related issues."

Mahmoud Saghaei, Editor-in-Chief

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Inspired by a lawsuit filed against McDonald's on behalf of two obese American girls, claiming that the fast food giant caused their debilitated health, Morgan Spurlock decided to test the claim by embarking on a month-long diet in which he aimed to eat every meal at the fast food chain. The resulting film is an irreverent look at obesity in America and its relation to fast food corporations.

Spurlock enlists the services of health professionals who monitor his health before, during and after the diet. On every count the experts declare that his general well-being is above average. When Spurlock asks the doctors what the 30-day diet would do to his health they suggest that he will probably end up with a higher blood-cholesterol level, but that his body could easily handle it.

The rules of the diet were simple. Throughout the month Spurlock had to 1) eat a “super size” meal if asked, 2) eat only those foods that are for sale over the counter at McDonald's, including water, 3) eat everything on the menu at least once in the 30 days, and 4) eat three full meals a day.

Although McDonald's is found worldwide, many people outside America may not understand how Spurlock followed such a diet. In addition to hamburgers, fries and sodas McDonald's in America sells omelets, salads,

fish sandwiches, and desserts, and also routinely ask customers whether they want to “super size” their meal, which means getting extra food for a slightly higher price.

While ordering lunch on the second day, Spurlock accepts an offer to super size his meal. At first he jokes about the enormous amount of food, which includes a half pound of fried potatoes and a quart of soda, along with McDonald's trademark “double quarter pounder” hamburger with cheese. However, half-way through Spurlock looks less enthusiastic. At the end of the meal, he vomits out of the window of his parked car. The scene is both disgusting and powerful, and it leads effectively into a discussion of the “toxic environment” fostered by the fast food industry. According to Kelly Brownell, professor of nutrition and eating disorders who was a consultant for the film, Americans live in a “toxic food and physical inactivity environment” that “almost guarantees” becoming ill.

Spurlock's doctors had not anticipated how the diet would strain his heart and liver, and he was advised several times to abandon the experiment before the month's end. However, he admits that he had become addicted to McDonald's, feeling anxious and depressed when hungry and high immediately after eating. By the end of the experiment Spurlock's

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weight increased by 25 pounds, and he had consumed 30 pounds of sugar and 12 pounds of fat. It took over six weeks for his cholesterol and liver functions to return to normal, and much longer to lose the extra weight.

Skeptical viewers may note that any one who eats too much of anything will get sick. Spurlock addresses this point by noting that although few people eat McDonald's for each and every meal, there are those who McDonald's itself describes as "heavy users" and "su-

per heavy users," people who eat it at least several times a week. Spurlock's experiment is not too far from the real world of junk food consumption, and it seems clear from the information provided in this film that Americans are eating themselves to death. "Super Size Me" is an informative and provocative film, and it deserves a wide audience among those who are truly concerned about health and nutrition.