

IS CORN MAKING US FAT?

FACT:
Buns contain
high-fructose
corn syrup.

MYTH:
Hamburgers
are always
100% beef.

OPINION:
A meal
without meat
is no fun.

MYTH:
"All-natural"
is always
good for
you.

FACT:
Cows fed
mostly corn
become
obese.

The number of overweight kids in the U.S. has tripled since 1980. Meanwhile, the amount of corn being added to our foods has risen dramatically. Is there a connection?

Many of the things that we eat are loaded with corn. Chicken nuggets are full of corn-starch. Corn syrup sweetens soda and ketchup. Even toothpaste has corn sugar.

"There are some 45,000 items in the average supermarket," writes author Michael Pollan. "More than a quarter of them contain corn."

Consider a meal from McDonald's. "When you eat fast food . . . you're eating corn," says Pollan. "The beef has been corn-fed. The main ingredient in soda is HFCS [high-fructose corn syrup], and half the calories in French fries come

from [frying them in] corn oil."

Why does this matter? Corn's high calorie and sugar content is a major reason that some 60 percent of Americans are overweight or obese, experts say. Obesity is deadly because it can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Kids—the biggest consumers of fast food—are at particular risk. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16 percent of Americans ages 6 to 19 are overweight or obese. That number—9 million—has tripled since 1980.

"It's a dangerous situation," nutrition expert Shawn Talbott tells *JS*. "Kids in school right now are on track to die at an earlier age than their parents. On a [danger] scale of 1 to 10, I give it a 10."

Cheap and Fatty

How did so much corn get into our food? In the early 1970s, the federal government encouraged farmers to grow more corn to make it cheap. Humans couldn't eat the cheapest grade of corn, but cows, pigs, and chickens could. Corn-fed cattle got bigger faster than grass-fed. Consumers cheered falling meat prices.

Yet that meat was less healthy. "Hamburger is mostly fat with a little meat thrown in," says Loren Cordain, a professor of health science at Colorado State University. The corn diet that cattle are fed "makes them obese," he tells *JS*.

Also in the 1970s, scientists developed a way to turn corn into a sweet syrup—HFCS. Companies switched from sugar to the cheaper HFCS to sweeten nearly everything.

"When you eat fast food, you don't realize it, but you're eating corn."

Fast-food chains and food makers soon realized that they could maximize profits by supersizing portions. The obesity problem ballooned. "Americans demand cheap food, and that's what they're getting," says Talbott. "[But] the price may be more expensive than anyone imagined."

Think Fresh!

Lately, however, Americans are waking up to the advantages of healthy eating. Schools are serving local organic produce. Even the White House has a new vegetable garden.

Ian Kimmel, 16, of Linwood, New Jersey, is doing his part by teaching kids how to cook with fresh ingredients. "[This way] kids can live healthier, longer lives," he tells *JS*. "They can taste the flavors and not just be eating to eat."

—Sandy Fritz

Eat Smart

How can you eat smart?

In a world filled with junk food, temptation is everywhere. If you do only 3 things to begin eating healthy, choose these.

1. LOSE THE BIG GULP.

Sucking down the biggest of those monsters is like eating a half pound of sugar. Even a 12-ounce, 150-calorie can of soda has the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of it. Drinking just one a day could make you gain up to 15 pounds a year.

2. DON'T BE FRIED.

Keep your heart healthy—and your stomach happy—by going for grilled or baked dishes rather than fried.

3. GO GREEN.

You don't have to eat Brussels sprouts three times a day. But try to get more salads with dark leafy greens into your diet. Fruits and vegetables have many of the vitamins, minerals, and fiber your body needs. While you're at it, go orange!

