



Because it takes more than willpower

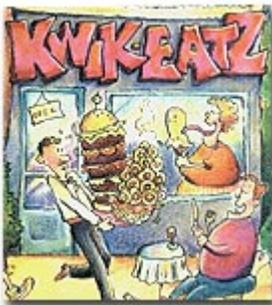
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Why it's hard to eat well and be active in America today

Food is abundant in the United States. There are 3,800 calories available in the food supply for each person each day. However, the average American (over the age of 4) needs about 2,350 calories per day.

American adults and children eat a third of their calories at restaurants and other food-service establishments, twice as much as 20 years ago. Restaurant portion sizes are huge—about 2 to 3 times larger than food labels list as a serving. Studies link eating out with obesity and higher caloric intakes and show that when people eat out, they consume more saturated fat and fewer nutrients than when they eat at home. Children eat almost twice as many calories when they eat a meal at a restaurant compared to a meal at home.



Few restaurants provide nutrition information at the point of decision-making. Half of chain restaurants don't provide any nutrition information to customers. The other half generally provide information on websites, which means people have to go home and log on to the Internet to figure out what to order. Restaurant brochures can be hard to find and difficult to read. As a result, people often consume more calories than they realize. [For example, a large chocolate shake at McDonald's has more calories than two Big Macs.](#) Even well-trained nutrition professionals tend to underestimate the amount of fat and calories in restaurant foods.

Food advertisements promote mostly foods high in calories, fat, or sugars. Only 2% of food advertising is for fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans, combined. 90% of the ads on Saturday morning television are for foods and beverages high in fats, sodium and added sugars, or are low in nutrients like sugary cereals, fast food and snack food.

Soft drinks are the single biggest source of calories in American's diet. Increases in children's calorie intake during the 1900's were driven by increased intakes of foods and beverages high in added sugars. Soft drinks are sold everywhere – even in many schools. And, soft drink portion sizes have greatly increased. In the 1950s, a bottle of Coke was 6 ½ ounces. Now, it's most commonly 20 ounces – that means that instead of getting 80 calories from a bottle of Coke, people now get 250 calories.

Children who consume more soft drinks consume more calories than kids who drink fewer soft drinks and are more likely to become overweight. Consumption of soft drinks can displace healthier foods from children's diets, like low-fat milk, which can help prevent osteoporosis.

Modern conveniences like remote controls, elevators, car washes, washing machines, leaf blowers, and drive-through windows at fast-food restaurants all mean less physical activity. The Dallas Morning News tallied up the number of calories a person could burn if he replaced several "convenient" activities, such as driving through a "drive-through" window, with their more active counterparts, such as walking into the store. Together, they added up to 8,800 calories worth of missed physical activity opportunities each month, or the amount of activity needed to burn off 2.5 pounds of fat.



Americans are not getting the basic nutrition education they need to maintain a healthy diet and healthy weight. Funding for nutrition education pales in comparison to what the food industry spends advertising unhealthy foods. [Federal funding to promote nutrition and physical activity also lags far behind funding to](#)

[prevent tobacco use.](#)

Physical education (PE) in schools, which gives kids a chance to be physically active and teaches them the skills they need for a lifetime of physical activity, is declining. Only a quarter of high school students participate in daily PE, down from 42% in 1991. In fact, half of high school students are not enrolled in PE at all.

Given all the forces working against Americans' attempts to maintain a healthy diet and weight, the government needs to do more than just cross its fingers and hope that the obesity problem goes away. To start, Congress and the Administration should 1) [increase the budget of the CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity](#), 2) [update USDA's nutrition standards for vending, a la carte, school stores and other foods sold in schools outside of the reimbursable meals](#), 3) [require calorie labeling at fast-food and other chain restaurants](#), and 4) [reduce junk-food marketing to children](#).

Education must be supported by policy changes that make it easier for people to eat better and be active. No one policy will solve the problem. However, a combination of policy approaches would help.

[Learn more about nutrition and physical activity policy options:](#)

http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/policy_options.html