

FAST FOOD AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT HEALTH

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Abstract

This study analyzes the phenomenon of fast food consumption and its impact on students' health in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with literature study method, this research examines the characteristics of fast food, driving factors for consumption, and resulting health implications. The results indicate that fast food has strong appeal for students due to its practicality, affordable price, and modern image. However, excessive consumption leads to various health problems such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and other degenerative diseases. These findings underscore the urgency of nutritional education and structured interventions to establish healthy consumption patterns among students.

Keywords: *Fast Food, Student Health, Nutrition, Consumption Patterns, Degenerative Diseases.*

INTRODUCTION:

Food, as one of the most basic human needs, serves functions far beyond simply satisfying hunger. Its contribution to sustaining life and supporting daily activities makes it an integral element of civilization (Laksono et al., 2022). In terms of health, the quality and patterns of food consumption directly influence a person's productivity and well-being. Therefore, an understanding of the importance of balanced nutrition must be continuously promoted across all levels of society, especially among the younger generation, who are vulnerable to the influences of modern lifestyles. Looking back, people's consumption patterns in ancient times were very different from those of today. They were completely independent of and unfamiliar with the instant or fast food that is so prevalent today, so their lifestyle and health were shaped by natural and locally available foods (Cahyani et al., 2023). This traditional diet tends to be healthier because it uses fresh ingredients that are prepared locally. The natural processing without the addition of preservatives or flavor enhancers makes traditional foods safer for long-term consumption.

Major changes have begun to occur along with the rapid flow of globalization accompanied by rapid advances in science and technology. The revolution in this field has touched almost all aspects of life, including the food industry, which has created new ways of producing, processing, and consuming food (Adriani et al., 2024). This transformation has not only changed people's consumption behavior but also had an impact on culture and lifestyle. In this context, fast food has emerged and developed very rapidly. Facts show that in recent decades, its consumption has increased significantly, and adolescent groups in urban areas are one of the main contributors to this trend (Katmawanti and Ulfah 2019 in Amin & Sulaiman, 2025). This phenomenon deserves serious attention considering the health impacts that may arise from the habit of consuming too much fast food.

The flexibility of fast food is its main attraction. Its wide variety, including both main meals and various snacks, allows this product to meet various needs and situations, from main meals to snacks in between busy schedules (Permatasari et al., 2024). In addition to its variety, the practicality factor it offers cannot be ignored. Its fast serving, relatively affordable prices for students, and easy access to it anywhere and anytime make it a hard choice to refuse in today's fast-paced modern lifestyle (Nathania & Jaksa, 2025). These characteristics are very much in line with the demands of student life. Busy and time-efficient. The ease of access offered by fast food restaurants with extensive networks further strengthens their position as a convenient dining solution. Furthermore, fast food has successfully positioned itself not only as a consumer product but also as a lifestyle symbol. Among students, this food is often considered prestigious, modern, and synonymous with "cool food" for the millennial generation. This image,

built through marketing and the social environment, strengthens its position in adolescents' preferences and consumption culture, making it more than just a matter of food, but also about identity and social interaction (Nathanian & Jaksa, 2025). It is undeniable that environmental factors and social pressures play a role in shaping positive perceptions of fast food. In fact, for some teenagers, visiting certain fast food restaurants is considered part of a lifestyle that follows the latest trends. However, behind its popularity, a number of critical health impacts are hidden. Fast food is generally characterized by low nutritional content and high calories. This composition is the main trigger for health problems, one of which is the increased risk of obesity in children and adolescents (Andriani et al., 2024). This condition raises concerns considering that students are active consumers who are most affected by this modern lifestyle. In addition to obesity, various degenerative diseases such as diabetes and hypertension also lurk in the future if the habit of consuming fast food is not properly controlled. An unbalanced consumption pattern in the long term can lead to deficiencies in important micronutrients needed for optimal growth and development. Based on the background that has been described, the author attempts to analyze in more depth the relationship between fast food consumption and its impact on students' health. The purpose of writing this journal is to identify the factors driving the prevalence of fast food consumption and describe its various negative implications for students' health status. This study also attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of students' eating habits in the modern era. Through this study, it is hoped that recommendations or preventive measures can be produced to minimize the negative impacts of fast food and encourage the creation of healthier consumption patterns among students. The long-term impact of this research is expected to contribute to increasing public awareness of the importance of healthy eating patterns from an early age.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with a literature review method. The qualitative approach was chosen to analyze secondary data in depth to understand the phenomenon of fast food consumption and its impact on student health in Indonesia (Abdul Fattah Nasuration, 2023). This approach allowed researchers to comprehensively explore various factors influencing consumption patterns, student perceptions, and the health implications of fast food consumption habits. The literature review method was used as the basis for the research to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of fast food consumption among adolescents and its relationship to nutritional status and health (Kalalinggi, 2024). Data were collected from various reliable secondary sources, such as scientific journals, reference books, and health publications discussing adolescent eating patterns, the nutritional content of fast food, and its impact on health. A literature search was conducted through reliable academic databases such as Google Scholar using keywords such as "fast food consumption," "adolescent health," and "student eating behavior" to ensure the relevance and depth of the reference material.

The research procedure includes three main stages: data collection, literature selection, and data analysis. During the data collection stage, the literature search focused on articles discussing fast food consumption preferences, determinants, and their relationship to health problems such as obesity and nutritional deficiencies in the student population. Literature selection was carried out by considering the credibility of the source, the year of publication (prioritizing the last 10 years), and its relevance to fast food. Data analysis was conducted thematically by grouping the literature findings into main themes that align with the research objectives. Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of fast food consumption issues among students. The research results are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of nutrition intervention programs and public awareness of the importance of healthy eating patterns in school-age children, particularly in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of modern lifestyles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Fast food is a type of food specifically designed to meet the demands of modern, fast-paced and dynamic life. According to Adriani et al. (2024), this food has fundamental characteristics such as ease of packaging, practicality in preparation, simplicity in processing, and ease of serving. This concept is growing rapidly along with the transformation of urban lifestyles that prioritize time efficiency in all aspects of life. In a sociological context, the presence of fast food represents a shift in cultural eating values from traditional to modern consumption patterns. Fast food exists as a solution to the time constraints experienced by various groups, especially students and workers who face the demands of busy activities. This food group usually comes in the form of products in practical packaging such as instant noodles, nuggets, and sausages that can last for a relatively long time (Hatta, 2019). This functional packaging allows food to be stored and consumed at any time without requiring a complicated preparation process, while also meeting the needs of high mobility of contemporary society. In terms of its physical characteristics, fast food offers advantages in terms of ease of access, practicality of presentation, and time efficiency. Specially designed

packaging allows this product to be easily carried anywhere without worrying about spills or damage during travel (Amin & Sulaiman, 2025). The fast preparation process is a major added value, as consumers do not have to wait long to enjoy the food. In terms of preservation, fast food generally has a relatively long shelf life thanks to the use of preservatives and sophisticated packaging techniques. Its hygienic presentation also increases the product's appeal to consumers, especially among students who are concerned about hygiene. Uniformity of taste and quality across various outlets guarantees the consistency expected by modern consumers. The flexibility of consumption that allows this food to be enjoyed anywhere—whether at home, in a vehicle, or in a public place—further solidifies its position in the mobile lifestyle. This combination of physical characteristics creates a dining experience that suits the demands of fast-paced modern life. Economically, fast food offers competitive and affordable prices for various groups, including students on a budget (Amin & Sulaiman, 2025). Marketing strategies through attractive promotions and discounts further strengthen the economic value of this product in the youth consumer market. However, from a nutritional perspective, fast food is known to be high in energy and fat, while low in fiber, vitamins, and essential minerals (Amalina et al., 2017). This imbalanced nutritional composition is a major concern given the potential health impacts of long-term consumption. Strong, addictive flavors are a strategy to maintain consumer loyalty, especially among adolescents who are sensitive to taste stimulation. The ever-expanding variety of products, including both modern fast food franchises and local adaptations of traditional fast food (Kirana & Wirjatmadi, 2023), caters to diverse consumer tastes. The high level of fast food consumption in modern society reflects a paradigm shift from eating as a biological need to an activity dominated by considerations of practicality and momentary pleasure (Mulyani et al., 2020).

The high rate of fast food consumption among the adolescent population is influenced by several main factors (Anwar, 2016):

a. Social and Social Factors

Social aspects are a strong driver of fast food consumption among adolescents, with several identified mechanisms. First, the tendency to imitate the behavior of others (social imitation) is a dominant factor, where adolescents tend to adapt the consumption habits of idolized figures or peer groups (Anwar, 2016). Second, fast food has transformed into a modern social space that facilitates interaction between peers, as well as a symbol of friendship and togetherness. Third, social pressure (peer pressure) within groups makes adolescents feel the need to follow consumption trends to be accepted in society. This phenomenon shows that fast food consumption has shifted in meaning from merely fulfilling biological needs to becoming part of the construction of adolescents' social identity (Nathania & Jaksa, 2025).

b. Practicality and Ease of Access Factors

Practicality and ease of access are strong rational considerations in fast food consumption preferences among students. In terms of time, fast food offers an effective solution for students with busy schedules juggling academics, extracurricular activities, and extracurricular activities (Mulyani et al., 2020). In terms of location, the strategic distribution of fast food outlets in shopping centers, near schools, and residential areas facilitates easy access without requiring special effort. Economically, relatively affordable prices with various attractive promotions make fast food a feasible choice for students on a limited budget (Amin & Sulaiman, 2025). This combination of factors creates a consumption ecosystem that strongly supports the spread of fast food culture among urban youth.

c. Psychological Factors and Modern Image

Psychological dimensions play a significant role in shaping adolescents' positive perceptions of fast food. First, fast food has successfully built an image as a symbol of a modern and global lifestyle through marketing strategies specifically targeting the adolescent segment (Anwar, 2016). Second, the pleasure factor (hedonic value) offered through strong flavors, attractive textures, and ingredient combinations designed to trigger sensory satisfaction. Third, the need for social recognition makes fast food consumption perceived as an activity that can increase status and prestige in the eyes of peers. This psychological mechanism explains why fast food is able to transcend its basic function as a provider of nutrition and transform into a cultural commodity full of symbolic meaning (Nathania & Jaksa, 2025).

The habit of consuming fast food excessively causes various serious health impacts.:

a. Metabolic Disorders and Obesity

The high calorie and saturated fat content of fast food contributes to an increased risk of obesity. Obesity then triggers insulin resistance, which leads to type 2 diabetes. According to Mozaffarian (2016), consistently elevated blood sugar is a direct result of fast food consumption. These metabolic disorders are interconnected and worsen overall health.

b. Vital Organ Damage

Excessive fast food consumption can damage several vital organs. Liver damage occurs due to fat accumulation (fatty liver disease), while intestinal damage is linked to disruption of the gut microbiota. Mozaffarian (2016) mentions the potential for brain damage due to a lack of essential nutrients and high levels of free radicals. Hypertension, as mentioned by Nathania & Jaksa (2025), also puts a strain on these vital organs.

d. Degenerative Diseases

In the long term, fast food consumption can trigger serious degenerative diseases. Andriani et al. (2024) cite diabetes, heart disease, and stroke as potential risks. Cancer can also be triggered by carcinogenic compounds formed during fast food processing (Mozaffarian, 2016). This group of degenerative diseases demonstrates the serious impact of fast food consumption on long-term health.

The health impacts of fast food consumption can be analyzed through several aspects (Permatasari 2024):

a. Nutritional and Metabolic Aspects

Nutritional imbalance is a fundamental problem with fast food consumption. High levels of calories, saturated fat, salt, and sugar are inversely proportional to low levels of fiber, vitamins, and minerals. This condition causes systematic and interconnected metabolic disorders. Obesity is the starting point for various more serious health complications.

b. Aspects of Vital Organs

Vital organ systems are overloaded by constant fast food consumption. The liver works overtime to metabolize excess fat, while the pancreas is exhausted from producing insulin. Blood vessels are stressed by high sodium and saturated fat. Damage to these vital organs is progressive and often goes unnoticed until it reaches an advanced stage.

c. Aspects of Degenerative Diseases

Degenerative diseases arise from the accumulation of various pre-existing disorders. Type 2 diabetes develops from untreated insulin resistance. Heart disease and stroke are consequences of atherosclerosis triggered by hypertension and dyslipidemia. Cancer can occur due to exposure to carcinogenic compounds found in fast food.

CLOSING

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been conducted, it can be concluded that fast food consumption among students has become a worrying phenomenon. The appeal of fast food lies in its practicality, affordable price, easy access, and modern image making it a popular choice among the younger generation. Social factors such as peer influence and urban lifestyles also strengthen this consumption trend. However, behind its popularity, fast food has various serious health impacts due to its unbalanced nutritional composition with a dominance of high calories, saturated fat, salt, and sugar.

This study also revealed that excessive and continuous consumption of fast food contributes to an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and various degenerative diseases such as heart disease and stroke. These health impacts are increasingly worrying considering that students are in a growth period that requires optimal nutritional intake. Therefore, systematic and comprehensive efforts are needed to address this problem, given the significant influence of the social and cultural environment on adolescent consumption patterns.

Based on the research findings, several strategic steps are recommended to reduce the negative impacts of fast food consumption. First, educational institutions need to implement comprehensive and sustainable nutrition education programs. Second, parents are expected to cultivate healthy eating habits at home and limit access to fast food. Third, the government needs to tighten regulations regarding the nutritional content of fast food products and promote affordable, healthy food alternatives. Collaboration between schools, families, and the government is key to creating an environment that supports healthy eating patterns among students..

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