

## **Food that Makes or Breaks You**

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Across school canteens and workplace pantries, one reality is hard to ignore: junk food and fast food have become staples in many people's daily lives. From chips and sodas to instant noodles and deep-fried snacks, these quick-fix meals are often chosen out of convenience, taste, and affordability. But the consequences of these dietary choices run far deeper than many realize.

Researchers and nutrition experts have long warned of the dangers associated with regularly consuming foods high in sugar, sodium, and saturated fats. These meals, while satisfying hunger in the short term, often lack the nutrients essential for growth, development, and mental performance. According to Mathipa and Semuli (2015), many people fail to recognize the connection between the food they eat and their health, treating meals simply as tools to silence hunger rather than sustain the body's critical systems.

The effects are particularly evident in school settings. Students who rely heavily on processed and fast foods tend to suffer from fatigue, frequent illnesses, and difficulty concentrating. Studies by Belot and James (2011) and Sorhaindo and Feinstein (2006) reveal that improved nutrition correlates with better academic performance, fewer absences, and more stable behavior. The quality of food consumed is directly tied to the quality of learning that takes place in the classroom.

Even in professional environments, the influence of diet is increasingly recognized. A workforce that eats well is more productive, focused, and less likely to take sick leave. Yet unhealthy eating habits persist, driven by stress, accessibility, and the fast-paced nature of modern life. Van Dyke et al. (2024) noted that people often eat based on how they feel in the moment, making impulsive decisions rather than thoughtful ones – especially when unhealthy options are the easiest to reach.

While the health risks are clear, reversing the trend requires more than just personal discipline. Experts believe that awareness is a crucial first step. Brunello et al. (2014) argue that when individuals are educated about the consequences of poor eating habits, their behavior begins to shift. This highlights the importance of integrating nutrition education into schools and community programs. Teaching individuals to read labels, plan balanced meals, and make informed food choices can help bridge the gap between knowledge and practice.

The journey toward better eating habits is not about strict restrictions or removing all indulgences. It is about making intentional, informed choices – ones that consider both present enjoyment and long-term health. As Mathipa and Semuli (2015) emphasize, food plays a central role in sustaining life. Its influence extends beyond the plate, shaping energy levels, behavior, and potential.

In a world where fast food dominates many menus, understanding its impact becomes essential. Whether in school, at work, or at home, food remains a powerful force – one that can build a brighter, healthier future, or slowly unravel it. The choice, though influenced by many factors, still lies in the hands of each individual.

Because when it comes to food, it really can make – or break – you.

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