

Fast food meals are smaller, have fewer calories than food served at restaurants

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A new study in the *Review of Agricultural Economics* compares fast food and table service meals at restaurants. Results show that both are larger and have more calories than meals prepared at home, with the typical fast food meal being smaller and having fewer calories than the average meal from a table service restaurant.

James K. Binkley of Purdue University used data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, which is the most recently available large sample of information regarding nutritional intake, to analyze fast food, table service restaurant meals, and meals prepared at home.

Fast food was found to be more energy dense than food from a table service restaurant. However, Binkley found that fast food meals tend to be smaller. Consequently, the typical fast food meal had fewer calories than the average meal from a table service restaurant, whether the diner is an adult, teenager, or child.

But, the study found that table service diners are more likely to reduce their food consumption during the rest of the day than are those eating at fast food restaurants, most likely because of the difference in energy density. As a result, fast food may ultimately result in more calories.

Perhaps the most surprising result of the study was the finding that fast food had the largest effects for adults, and that children's caloric intakes were greatest when they ate at table service restaurants.

Source: Wiley

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