



Super Size Me

FILM SYNOPSIS

What would happen if you ate nothing but fast food for an entire month? Documentary filmmaker Morgan Spurlock embarks on a 30-day strict fast food diet during which he can only eat or drink anything that is on McDonald's menu; he must eat three meals a day, consume everything on the menu at least once and supersize his meal if asked.

On a gruelling quest to find out the physical and mental effects of consuming fast food, Spurlock travels across the USA talking to food experts and everyday fast food fans to find out the truth behind the meals served at the golden-arches.

Spurlock looks at America's food culture and sheds a new light on what has become one of our nation's biggest health problems: obesity.

The film will make you think twice about picking up another Big Mac.

Genre: Documentary, comedy

DIRECTOR

A graduate of the New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Super Size Me is Morgan Spurlock's first feature film. He was inspired to make the documentary after watching a news story about two teenagers suing McDonald's.

Super Size Me is the first ever reality-based movie where everything begins and ends in 30 days. The camera captures the director's highs and lows as he sets out on his unhealthy diet and demonstrates to the viewers the effects of eating fast food.

During his career Spurlock has conceived and created everything from commercials to music videos to television shows, and has worked with MTV, ESPN, NBC, FOX, TNT and VH-1. He is also the founder of The Con, the New York based production company behind the film.

Super Size Me cost £37,000 (\$65,000) which is a small budget for a film that had such a large impact. The documentary won over twenty-seven awards and prestigious accolades including Best Director, Sundance Film Festival and New Director Award, Edinburgh International Film Festival 2004.



ACTIVITIES

Research Morgan Spurlock's other work. What programmes does his production company The Con produce? What other programmes has he worked on? Write a biography for him.

- What are your thoughts on the film? Do you like it? Do you like Spurlock's way of directing/presenting?
- What do you think of his use of cartoons to explain serious pieces of information? Does it work or does it trivialise the subject matter?
- Do you think the diary format works?
- How else might he have presented the documentary?
- Can you tell the film was made on a small budget?
- Why do you think it has won so many awards?
- Morgan Spurlock has been compared to fellow documentary-maker Michael Moore. What do you know about Michael Moore and can you see any similarities in their work?

SPURLOCK v McDONALD's

For many people Super Size Me is an exposé of the multi-million pound fast food industry. It strips away the glossy layers of McDonald's highly manufactured image and demonstrates to the film's audience and to the world, the realities of its products, while to critics of the movie, Spurlock's 30-day fast food diet is nothing but misleading and irresponsible.

McDonald's issued a press release shortly after the release of the film with their response. A quote from the release is below:

McDonald's has always been committed to playing a constructive, responsible role in developing solutions to our customers' lifestyle needs – offering more menu variety, promoting physical activity, and supporting consumer education.

Our customers are smart. They know what's best for themselves and their families. And our customers continue to trust McDonald's, because they know we offer a wide variety of high-quality food choices.

This movie is all about one individual's decision to act irresponsibly by consuming more than 5,000 calories a day - twice the recommended level for adult males - and by purposely limiting his physical activity. That's why this movie makes no contribution to the important dialogue taking place today on nutrition and balanced lifestyles.

We see no reason to respond to Morgan Spurlock when so many other experts have already spoken out on the film's distortions and irresponsibility...

Even though the fast food giant refuses to accept that there is any truth in the documentary, soon after the film's release ...they stop offering the Super Size portions.

ACTIVITIES

- Why might McDonald's be anxious about Super Size Me being made?
- Spurlock tried over ten times to get to speak to someone from McDonald's. Why wouldn't they want to talk to him? How do you think they come across in the film?
- What do you think of the statement from the McDonald's press release?
Visit www.mcdonalds.com and read the full press release.
- If you were the public relations team responsible for writing the press release, what else might you have included or left out? Have a go at writing another press release from McDonald's.

Do a quick survey in your class:

- Who do you agree with? Has the director gone too far? Or are McDonald's just trying to hide the truth about their products?
- Write a 500-word article for the McDonald's company newsletter explaining to employees why they should boycott the film.

or

- Write a web-blog/film review for a movie website explaining why people should watch the movie, then boycott McDonald's.

FAST FOOD AND A FAT NATION

During his 30-day fast food binge Spurlock put on 25lbs, and suffered a whole array of health problems that seem to be brought on from eating too much fast food and taking little exercise. The film demonstrates America's battle with obesity and shares shocking statistics on just how unhealthy the nation is and just how large the McDonald's corporation is.

Statistics:

60% of all Americans are either overweight or obese

One in every three children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime

Each day, 1 in 4 Americans visit a fast food restaurant

French fries are the most eaten vegetable in America

You would have to walk for seven hours straight to burn off a Super Sized Coke, fries and Big Mac

McDonald's operates more than 30,000 restaurants in more than 100 countries on 6 continents

McDonald's feeds more than 46 million people a day - more than the entire population of Spain

Source: www.supersizeme.com

The film also explores the horror of school lunch programmes, declining health and physical education classes, food addictions and the extreme measures people take to lose weight and regain their health.

Activities

- What health problems did Spurlock suffer from after eating the McDonald's diet?
- Who do you think is to blame for the fat epidemic in the USA?
- Do you think that people should be able to sue food companies for making them fat? Using your notes from the film draw up a detailed list on the reason why people in the USA are obese and how organisations like McDonald's are contributing to it.
- Do some research into the UK's eating habits. Are we a nation of obese people?



The Food Standards Agency has launched the website www.eatwell.gov.uk offering up-to-date and interesting information on eating healthily. Create a quiz for the website targeted at teenagers to find out how much they know about fast food. Use some of the statistics from the film. The first two questions have been started for you. Try the quiz on your friends and family.

EAT WELL QUIZ

- What is the most eaten vegetable in the USA?
Carrots
French Fries
Sweet Corn

- How many McDonald's restaurants are there across the world?
10,000
50,000
30,000

Write and design some information cards for young people telling them about healthy eating. How many calories should you eat a day? How many pieces of fruit? What is the recommended amount of exercise we should get a week? How many times a week is it ok to eat fast food?

FOOD MARKETING

Food Marketing Statistics:

In 2001 McDonald's spent around \$1.4 million on direct media advertising, which includes television, radio and print

Before most children can speak they can recognise McDonald's

McDonald's distributes more toys per year than Toys-R-Us

In the USA the average child sees 10,000 TV advertisements per year

Source: www.supersizeme.com



UK FILM COUNCIL
LOTTERY FUNDED





ACTIVITIES

- Hold a brainstorming session. How does McDonald's market its food?
- Looking at your notes from the film, what are the pros and cons of McDonald's current marketing techniques?
- Why might parents and food/health experts become cynical of McDonald's constant targeting of children in their marketing campaigns?
- What other marketing ideas could McDonald's use to reach their target audience? Put together a marketing campaign for McDonald's, that offers them ways of reaching their target audience (young people) but without the underhand techniques.

Author: Helen Dugdale

©Film Education 2006

