

## **Junk Food**

What is the big issue about junk food? If it is purely junk, why is it even called food?

The key components of junk food are fat and sugar. One gram of fat contains 9 calories, making junk food extremely high in calories. Junk food is also fast food, so you can be sure it is prepared in the quickest and cheapest way. The Oxford Dictionary describes junk food as food with little nutritional value. Junk food is as it says, laden with junk – high concentrations of refined sugars, fat, salt, colourings, preservatives, artificial flavourings and artificial sweeteners, providing very little of the essential micronutrients, vitamins and minerals, our bodies so badly require.

If you're a junk food junky your diet may look like this:

**Breakfast:** King Size Mars Bar and 500 ml of Cola

**Lunch:** Cornish Pasty, a Pepperami and can of Irn Bru

**Dinner:** A whole Ham and Pineapple Pizza Take Away, 3 cans of lager

This is what your nutritional intake for the day would be:

**Mars bar king size** (100g): 473 kcals, 18.9g fat, 10,3 g saturated fats, 66.2 g total sugars

**Cola** 500mls: 205 kcals, 54.5 g total sugars

**Pepperami** 28g: 154 kcals, 14.3 g fat, 5.5 g saturated fat, 0,5 g Sodium

**Cornish Pasty** 200g: 534 kcals, 32.6 g fat, 11,8 g saturated fats, 0.8 mg Sodium

**Irn Bru** 330ml can: 142 kcals, 35 g sugar

**Ham and pineapple pizza** 400g: 1040 kcals, 34 g fat, 15 g saturated fat, 1,2g Sodium

**Lager** 3 pints: 681 kcals

This adds up to a total of:

3229 calories, 99.8 g fat, 42.6 g saturated fats (nearly 50 % of total fat intake), 6,25 g salt.

A high saturated fat intake is a major influence on the level of cholesterol in the blood, a major risk factor for heart disease.

Our energy balance is so fine that it only takes an extra biscuit each day to gain 2kg in a year. So it will be bad news for those relying on high calorie junk food regularly. When it comes to healthy eating, a balanced approach is the best; there are no good or bad foods. There is a place for occasional junk food in our diets, provided that for the majority of time we eat:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Plenty of wholegrain products
- Moderate amounts of low fat milk and dairy foods
- Moderate amounts of lean meat and fish
- Small amounts of fatty and sugary foods

If you are relying on junk food and would like to make changes but feel so far away from the above, the key is to make changes gradually so that new eating habits replace old ones over time. You could for example eat one piece of fruit and one portion of vegetable, aiming for 5 a day eventually. It is all about managing your life and having healthier foods available.

There have been some findings that junk food may be addictive, as addictive as hard drugs. Studies using rats have shown that the rats love the high-fat foods and they overeat. It is suggested that a high-fat diet appears to alter the brain biochemistry in a similar way to drugs such as morphine, due to the release of opioids – chemicals in the brain – that reduce the feeling of being full.