SUPERSIZED NATION

Are fast-food restaurants responsible for teens' obesity?

School just let out. You have hunger pangs and a limited wallet. What do you do? If you're like many kids, you go grab a burger.

A group of New York teens did just that—day after day, year after year. Then, last fall, they filed a lawsuit against McDonald's. They claimed the Golden Arches have helped create a nation of obesity.

The suit was thrown out, but the teens aren't giving up. At press time, they were aiming to refile it.

FATTY FOODS

"We are in the middle of an epidemic of obesity, which starts in childhood," says Richard Daynard, a law professor at Northeastern University. Fast-food restaurants contribute to the problem, he says.

Supporters of the suit, like Daynard, say that fast-food restaurants should let customers know how many calories are in each meal. "If people were told, a lot of people would order smaller sizes or order something else," says Daynard.

Critics also say that quick-service chains should stop pitching "super-sized" packages that are loaded with calories—typically more than half of what the government recommends for a day. What's worse, Daynard says, is that fast-food chains market to very young kids, who are easily influenced.

PERSONAL CHOICES

"Obesity does not come down to one simple problem," says Sheila Cohn, manager of nutrition policy at the National Restaurant Association. "Children aren't as active as they used to be. That's a huge part of it."

Cohn and other opponents of the suit say that restaurants are only responsible for providing food, not for what people choose to eat or how much. "These lawsuits are taking all of your personal responsibility and throwing it away," Cohn says. Critics of the suit also note that fast-food restaurants do offer healthy choices.

"Any food can be part of a healthy diet," Cohn adds. "The key is balance and moderation."

➤ What do *you* think? Is fast food to blame for teens' weight gain?

—Heather Holliday

YES
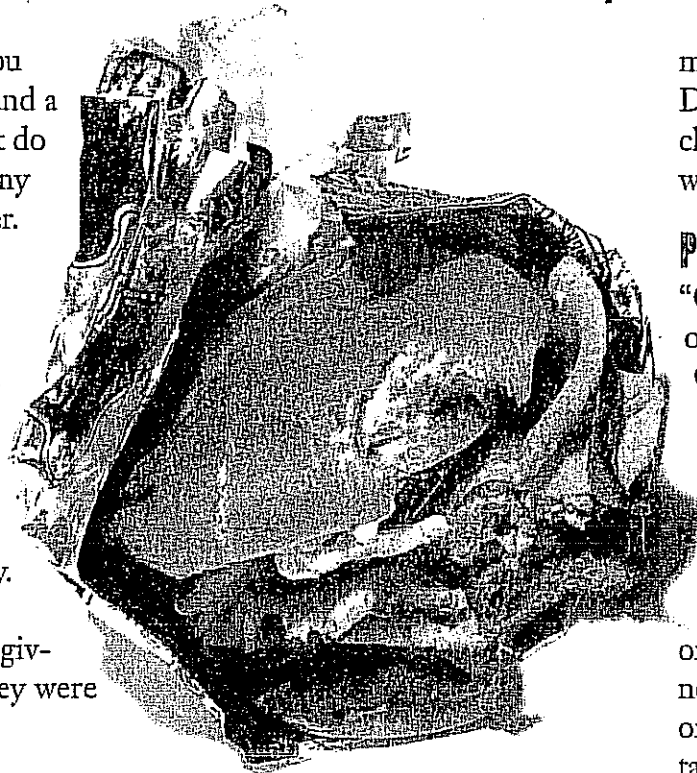
Fast-food restaurants target kids with toy promotions and Happy Meals. Once kids are hooked, they keep going back—thinking it's the only affordable quick-food choice. Most teens don't realize a Quarter Pounder with Cheese and Super Size French Fries contain 1,140 calories and 59 grams of fat. These are health hazards without warning labels!

IF YOU SAY YES: How do you know fatty *homemade* meals aren't making people gain weight?

NO

People know better than to eat a diet of grease-filled burgers and fries. Everyone knows it's healthier and cheaper to eat a sandwich or a salad made at home. Parents, not fast-food chains, are responsible for making sure their kids eat healthily. These lawsuits are ridiculous. It's like suing TV producers for making kids inactive!

IF YOU SAY NO: How do you feel about fast-food restaurants marketing to young kids to "hook" them?

WRITE YOUR OPINION!

What do *you* think? Are fast-food chains responsible for teens' obesity? Write a persuasive paragraph explaining your opinion. Then e-mail your name, age, city, state, and response to us at scopemag@scholastic.com. We may print your thoughts in a future issue of *Scope*.

Response to Persuasive Text

Article: _____

Issue Statement:
_____
_____
_____

PROs (+)	CONs (−)

Opinion Statement:
_____
_____
_____