

## Economic Cents: Eat at Home, Eat Fast Food, or Lipodiesel?

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As with many industries today, the hospitality industry is seeing some tough times. There is anxiety among restaurant owners, lodging managers, and customers. Everyone's trying to cut costs. From the operational side, the economic downturn has caused layoffs, reduction in work hours, consolidation of departments within operations, hiring and salary freezes, reduction of benefits and elimination of amenities. The reality is, the customer has now turned more to fast food or to preparing food at home.

A recent study published in the December 2008 *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, "Why Eat at Fast-Food Restaurants: Reported Reasons among Frequent Consumers" cites the three most common reasons people choose fast food, it's fast, easy and cheap. Ninety-two percent of those surveyed stated that it was fast, 80% said that it was easy to get and 63% of those polled said it was cheap. Admittedly, only 20% of the adults and teens polled felt that fast food was nutritious and 11% believed that fast food was "fun and entertaining". The findings of the study imply that there was a direct correlation between fast food choices and a current [epidemic of obesity](#). The two resolutions offered were to either have more options that are healthy and fast or to have faster concepts focused more on healthier items.

I am still having a difficult time processing that the latter choice of having fast food concepts develop healthier items could be a reality. [Dunkin' Donuts](#) recently introduced a waffle breakfast sandwich that contains 390 calories, 23 g of fat, 8 g of saturated fat, 1000 mg of sodium, 28 g of carbs, 1 g of dietary fiber, 6 g of sugar, and 16 g protein. For only \$2.99, you can have all this "nutrition". However, it does contain cherry wood smoked bacon, scrambled eggs, and American cheese stuffed between two "Maple-infused" waffles. "Maple-infused"?

Some websites <http://www.thesimpledollar.com> and <http://chowhound.chow.com/> offer cost comparisons for creating basic items at home versus eating at a fast food concept. Specifically, there is one such comparison located at <http://www.thesimpledollar.com/2007/09/12/does-cooking-at-home-really-beat-the-mcdonalds-1-double-cheeseburger/> that itemizes the differences between producing a McDonald's cheeseburger in McDonalds and preparing one at home. The author of the article noted that it was cheaper to make it at home (for one three ounce burger), was less time consuming, healthier (less grams of fat) and allowed for additional options that could be added to the burgers (fresh tomatoes vs. ketchup). The writer was able to make five cheeseburgers and have leftovers.

Homemade Cost	McDonald's Cost
3 pounds hamburger @ \$1.99 lb. = \$5.97	16 McDonald's Cheeseburgers= \$17.12
16 slices cheese, store brand = \$1.99	
16 hamburger buns, actually 2 packs of 8 = \$3.98	
1 small bottle ketchup = \$1.50	

Total= \$13.44	
<b>Nutritional Values –Homemade 1 burger</b>	<b>Nutritional Values -McDonald's 1 burger</b>
Calories: 243	Calories: 440
Calories From Fat: 144	Calories From Fat: 210
Total Fat: 16 grams /% Daily Value: 24%	Total Fat: 23 grams /% Daily Value: 35%
Saturated Fat: 6 grams/ % Daily Value: 30%	Saturated Fat: 11 grams/ % Daily Value: 54%
Trans Fat: 0 grams/ % Daily Value: 0%	Trans Fat: 1.5 grams/ % Daily Value: 80%
Cholesterol: 80 milligrams/ % Daily Value: 26%	Cholesterol: 80 milligrams/% Daily Value: 26%

The perception that fast food is cheaper than homemade food may be a myth. However, in lean times people will seek out foods that are cheaper and oftentimes less nutritious. They might be calorie-rich and nutrient-poor, as they may contain refined grains, sugars and fats. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention claims that more than one-third of adults and children are currently obese in the United States. Unfortunately, any progress in lowering this statistic may be hindered by the current economic crisis <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27426596/>.

For resources on how to eat healthy on a limited budget in a lean time, I recommend reading the following articles:

<http://www.bio-medicine.org/medicine-news-1/Healthy-Eating-and-Good-Nutrition-Go-Hand-in-Hand-in-Tight-Economic-Times-31515-1/>

<http://www.helium.com/knowledge/164341-how-to-save-money-and-eat-healthy>

*As an aside, but related to the extra fat you may be consuming from choosing to eat too much fast food, here's a thought:*

*Dr. Craig Bittner M.D., a liposuction specialist in Beverly Hills was recycling the fat from his patients to power his SUV and his girlfriend's Lincoln Navigator. He advertised in Continental Airlines in-flight magazine but is no longer practicing as it is illegal to use human medical waste to power vehicles in California. I wonder what other type of human products had been used to power vehicles to get that law on the books. His somewhat defunct site is located at <http://www.lipodiesel.org/> and other articles on the "fat" doctor are located at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/article5393763.ece> and <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,473078,00.html>. He apparently is now in South America and hopefully...driving a hybrid.*