

**Professor Richard Townsend**  
**DEP 2000, Human Growth and Development**  
**PSY 2012, Introduction to Psychology**

**Health Psychology Module**  
***DYING TO EAT***

Many people have medical symptoms and worry about their health. They go to a doctor for a diagnosis and a prognosis then completely ignore the medical advice they are given. Why?

The average college student does not smoke, but a significant percentage of students do smoke. They know that smoking can shorten their lives by several years, and their last years of life might be very unpleasant if they have fallen victim to smoking related maladies such as emphysema, lung cancer or heart disease. Smoking is a slow form of suicide. The more education a person has the less likelihood of their being a smoker. College students can certainly read the warning labels on each and every cigarette package. They know smoking is bad for them, and they typically know that they should stop. Why don't they?

It is often said that we are what we eat. We might update that old saying to "we are what we overeat". We are experiencing a national epidemic of obesity. It is not just a matter of overeating and under-exercising. We are participants in a global experiment on non-traditional diets, and the preliminary results are anything but encouraging. We are eating inordinate amounts sugar, salt and saturated fat as well as a witch's brew of chemical additives. Young adults might be the first generation in recorded history to live shorter lives than their parents. It is speculated that more people will die of obesity related illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease/high blood pressure, strokes and some forms of cancer than deaths from automobile accidents and communicable illnesses combined. People are knowingly killing themselves with the amount of food they are eating and the unwholesome types of foods they are eating. Why don't they stop?

**QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Restaurants are a relatively new phenomenon in human history. Why do many people living in urban and sometimes suburban areas either order out or eat every meal, every day from restaurants, cafes or food carts?
2. The intact, nuclear American family is becoming less common. How have fractured families, busy student afterschool schedules, and hectic parental work lives affected the traditional family breakfast and evening meal? What are the dietary and family relationship consequences?
3. We watched the movie, *Supersize Me*. Decades ago fast food restaurants were a relative rarity in South Florida, and most people would eat fast foods rather infrequently. Most of what is served in these restaurants is not good for us and can be life-shortening if eaten with regularity. Why do we continue to do this to ourselves?

4. Speculate on the cultural, social and personal factors that contribute to obesity.
5. What are the emotional consequences of eating a meal that we know is bad for us versus eating food that we know is good for us.
6. What are the interpersonal and environmental consequences associated with the fast food phenomenon?