

Editorial



Harmful effects of junk foods – But what about canteen and restaurant food?

Junk foods are popular as they are easy to produce and taste good: burgers, pizzas, potato wafers and fries attract a lot of people, as a brief glance at the every-day 'food to go' or behaviour in front of the TV or computer reveals. Because of their critical nutritional value, junk foods are being observed with suspicion by nutritionists. These products usually contain high amounts of fat and/or sugar and/or sodium salts. Recently, this type of food has come under attack for potentially altering the consumer's brain chemistry, in the same way as highly addictive drugs do. Studies on the biological mechanisms that lead to 'junk food addiction' have been initiated. In fact, most of the products are designed for 'high hedonic value', in order to induce people to eat more.

Hence, with the excess of calories, obesity, diabetes and other diseases arise that are considered to lead to a reduced life expectancy for the next generation. It would be premature to prejudge 'junk food addiction' at this point, but the danger to human health posed by this type of food remains undisputed, even by the producers. They point out that it is entirely up to the consumer to decide whether she/he wants to eat junk foods, *i.e.* it is simply a question of personal liability.

The fact that there is a potentially low nutritional value in 'traditional' junk foods is the subject of discussions in both scientific circles and the media. But for everybody who over the years has had the pleasure of enjoying food in a student and later on in an office/business canteen, the question arises why the food offered by these institutions is not regarded under the same point of view. You will certainly agree that

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the danger of addiction is low, but what about the nutritional value? Is it sufficient to introduce a salad bar, which most canteens are very proud of, to compensate for obvious deficiencies such as low quality meat, sticky sauces, practically no (and if at all, over-cooked) vegetables? The same question arises if you have a look at the food offered in hospitals, although the conditions are different. The average stay in these institutions is only short and more effort is devoted to affording patients a rapid recovery rather than providing well-balanced menus. All this is definitely food for thought.

Of course, there is a wide range of quality and price categories, which do not necessarily correlate with reality. Take, for instance, a medium-priced restaurant frequented by the average consumer. Just how many of these eateries offer tasty and well-balanced food? Sadly, you are often disappointed. You have to spend more money, probably so much that you decide to select one of the famous star-rated restaurants. You will be thrilled with the ambience, style and food preparation, every-

thing first class. But the nutritional value? Certainly, we can exclude the danger of obesity, and that of addiction is minimized by the empty pocket, but well-balanced nutritional contents are rarely found. We should begin or, hopefully, continue to be educationally effective, not only to reduce the consumption of 'food to go' but also critically evaluate and modify each of the food sources

which only at first glance seem to be good.

You might complain that the 'molecular aspects' are missing in this Editorial, for which we may be forgiven at this point. For this we once again have many contributions in *Molecular Nutrition & Food Research* this coming year, which consider specific nutritional and health aspects, as for instance the special issues devoted to the topics 'green tea', 'resveratrol' and 'carotenoids'. Looking back over the past year, we are pleased about the success of *Molecular Nutrition & Food Research*, underlined in particular by the impressive impact factor of 4.356. Along with the members of the MNF Editorial Board, we share our pleasure with our authors and reviewers who ensure that the required quality criteria are fulfilled. We will continue this way in the future. Cordial thanks are devoted to all who have contributed to this aim and who remain loyal to us.

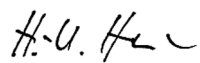
Finally, please allow a brief administrative remark. As the journal has been receiving many submissions exhibiting extensive and correct research work on products in which a single 'bioactive' constituent has not been (or could not be) defined as yet – until recently a criterion for exclusion in MNF – we have decided to introduce a new category entitled 'Food & Function', in which such contributions can be integrated. Kindly visit the 'Instructions to Authors' on the journal homepage to read more about this new section.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the members of the Life Science Department at Wiley, who have supported the MNF board members, authors,

reviewers, guests and, in particular, us. We are looking forward to the New Year which will hopefully bring good health and success to us all.



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