

# 35. Marketing the Culture of Obesity

## Our Uphill Battle Against Weight Loss



### Speaking Exercise

Instructions: *Discuss the following questions with the members of your group.*

1. Do you exercise for 20 minutes at least 5 days per week? If so, what do you do? (cycle, run, walk, swim, aerobics)
2. Generally, how would you rate our population's physical fitness?  
Poor      Fair      Good      Excellent
3. Have you eaten fast-food or take-out food in the last 7 days? If so, what did you eat?
4. In your opinion, what is the most important thing people can do to improve (or maintain) their health?



### Reading Exercise

Instructions: *Read the text and complete the comprehension and writing questions that follow.*

If you look around the classrooms, malls and offices of our country, you'll notice **an alarming trend**: Canadians are becoming increasingly obese. Traditionally, we have pointed the finger of blame at overeaters and midnight snackers. Karl Moore and Laurette Dubé, professors of *Marketing Strategy and Consumer Behaviour* at McGill University, suggest that much of the blame should be placed at the feet of the marketers rather than the consumers.

At the time the fast-food industry really took off in the mid 1980s, a consumer purchased a standard 10-ounce soft drink. Today thanks to *super sizing*, it is not unusual for that same consumer to order a 64 ounce beverage at the cinema. Moore and Dubé point out that this super-sized beverage contains close to one-third of the recommended daily caloric intake. Twenty years ago, the typical McDonald's meal included a hamburger, fries and a 12-ounce Coke, which combined was **just shy of 600 calories**. Fast forward to today and the typical order includes a Quarter Pounder with Cheese, super-size fries and a super-size Coke. This increase in size comes with quite a heavy price: a staggering 1,400 calories! With this bigger equals better trend, it's no wonder that Canadians are also getting bigger around the waistline. From a marketing standpoint, super sizing is a logical business practice. As consumers, we feel guilty if we eat two small hamburgers; however, if we eat just one "big" hamburger, we can munch away with a clear conscience. Moreover, when the fast food industry increases the portion size, the actual increase to the consumer is **marginal**, whereas the increase in profit is substantial. The biggest cost in the fast food industry is in advertising. Once you have the customer through the door, it's in a restaurant's best interest to keep him/her happy by providing more food at a perceived lower cost. A well-fed customer is a "happy customer", albeit a potentially obese citizen!

Moore and Dubé also address another universal marketing approach that they feel has contributed to our national obesity crisis. Throughout the past decade, clothing manufacturers

have gradually been increasing clothing sizes. What used to be a size 8 is now a size 9. This little numeric illusion may look benign but it has effectively lessened a consumer's ability to notice a subtle weight gain. It has also been suggested that more and more clothing is being produced with elastic waists and fabric which stretches. All of these factors help to keep us reaching for that super sized food and keep us away from the gym.

Adults are not the only innocent victims of this marketing strategy. The marketing industry targets the youth because it knows that the sooner they can build brand loyalty, the more profits they stand to make. Our local school boards enter into product agreements with multinational corporations which for a fee, are given exclusive rights to put vending machines in elementary and secondary schools. Our kids are no longer reaching for a carton of milk at lunch time, but rather, they grab a pop and candy bar from the cafeteria vending machine. What sort of mixed messages are we sending our children when on the one hand we **pester** them to get outside and play on the weekend; and on the other hand we tell them it's acceptable to snack on empty calories at school? Moore and Dubé point out that it's not all gloom and doom. Kraft Foods Inc. has announced that its in-school marketing program would be phased out in the coming months and in addition, it intends to produce healthier products in smaller portion sizes. Even the fast-food industry giant McDonald's has added vegetable wraps and salads to its menu.

1. Find a synonym in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph for the word "rational". \_\_\_\_\_
2. What does the expression "an alarming trend" (in the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph) mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Find an example of a double negative in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph. \_\_\_\_\_
4. The word "marginal" (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph) is: (a) a noun (b) a verb (c) an adjective (d) an adverb
5. According to the passage, all of the following statements are true EXCEPT: (a) Moore and Dubé are on the faculty of McGill University. (b) Clothing manufacturers have been getting larger. (c) McDonald's is now attempting to cater to the consumer's desire for "healthier" fast-food alternatives. (d) Vending machines in schools are contributing to the problem of adolescent obesity.
6. The expression "just shy of 600 calories" (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph) means: (a) more than 600 calories (b) significantly less than 600 calories (c) marginally less than 600 calories (d) exactly 600 calories
7. The word "pester" (in the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph) could be replaced with all of the following EXCEPT: (a) annoy (b) bother (c) harass (d) hassle

### Extension Questions for Writing

*Answer the following questions using sentence format.*

1. In your opinion, should companies be permitted to place vending machines in elementary and secondary schools? Why or Why not?

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2. Why do you think the fast-food industry has reached such prominence in North America?

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3. Summarize the main idea of this article. Pay close attention to the role of both the food industry and the clothing industry in Canada's obesity crisis.

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**Grammar Exercise:** Speculating About The Past and The Present

1. The **Second Conditional** is used to express how things might be different from the way they actually are now. It can also be used to discuss unreal or impossible situations.

Forming The Second Conditional:

If + past tense ..., would + base form of the verb

(example) If I won the lottery, I would move to Paris.

☞ We use "were" for both singular and plural subjects in Second Conditionals.

2. The **Third Conditional** is used to speculate about how things might have been different in the past. In other words, it is used to discuss unreal situations in the past.

Forming The Third Conditional:

If + past perfect tense ..., would have + past participle of the verb

(example) If I had studied for the test, I would have passed it with flying colours.

Exercise One     Instructions:     *Combine the sentences in each question into one sentence. Use the second conditional.*

1. He doesn't have enough time. He can't prepare a healthy lunch.

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2. I can't eat whatever I want whenever I want. I can't eat a chocolate bar every day.

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3. Many people watch too much television and eat too much fast food. Many people are not physically fit.

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4. Write your own second conditional sentence using the pattern above.

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**Exercise Two**    Instructions:    *Complete each sentence using the third conditional.*

1. If I had known that a super-sized drink had that many calories, I \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. If my son had played outside instead of sitting in front of the television, he \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Write your own third conditional sentence using the pattern above.  
\_\_\_\_\_

 **Vocabulary Development: Food Idioms**

Instructions:    *Match the idioms on the left with the appropriate definition on the right.*

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| 1. bring home the bacon (verb)         | chit chat                 |
| 2. big cheese (noun)                   | not well thought out      |
| 3. cream of the crop (noun)            | reveal a secret           |
| 4. chew the fat (verb)                 | to use one's intelligence |
| 5. in a nutshell (expression)          | the best                  |
| 6. a piece of cake (noun / expression) | easy                      |
| 7. use your noodle (verb)              | to be very busy           |
| 8. butter someone up (verb)            | confused                  |
| 9. out to lunch (adjective)            | in short                  |
| 10. spill the beans (verb)             | compliment or praise      |
| 11. a half-baked idea (adjective)      | the boss                  |
| 12. to have a lot on your plate (verb) | earn money                |



Now it's your turn! Use one of the idioms listed above in your own sentence.

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