

“I’m Lovin’ it!”
Peter Travers, Rolling Stone

“Fun and outrageous!”
*Tom O’Connell
Entertainment Weekly*

“Two thumbs up!”
Eric & Roger

SUPER SIZE ME

A Film of Epic Portions



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SYNOPSIS

Super Size Me is a documentary of the journey taken by filmmaker Morgan Spurlock.

He goes on a 30 day experiment of eating only food from McDonalds.

If it isn't available over the counter of McDonalds he won't eat it.

He goes through the experiment with the assistance and supervision of three doctors and along the way discovers some interesting tid-bits about the fast food industry.

BACKGROUND

Morgan Spurlock, producer/director/guinea pig of *Super Size Me*, was sitting on the couch at his childhood home in West Virginia on Thanksgiving 2002, stuffed with turkey and all the fixings, when the concept behind *Super Size Me* came to him.

"I was so full and was watching the news when a story about the two girls suing McDonald's came on the TV. I immediately called Scott (Ambrozy, Director of Photography) and told him the idea. When he finished laughing, he said 'That's a really great bad idea.' By the time I got back to New York, we were already in pre-production on it."

A native of West Virginia, Spurlock is an award-winning writer, director and producer. He is also the founder of The Con, the New York based production company behind the film whose goal is to level the playing field in the world of production.

Super Size Me is Spurlock's first feature film.

Super Size Me differs from Michael Moore's documentaries such as *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* because it is not political in nature, and Spurlock does not drown the facts in comment, but rather lets them speak for themselves.

Spurlock asks at the very beginning of *Super Size Me*, 'Where does personal responsibility stop and corporate responsibility begin?'. That seems to be the central theme of the film. Are McDonald's and other fast food companies to blame for the obesity epidemic sweeping America? Or is being overweight the fault of the individual in question?

One would be hard pressed to watch this movie, and the special features offered on the DVD and not be impressed with the research and the harm that consumers are currently facing regarding the availability of fast food's through fast food establishments. On the surface, this film is an apparent attack on the approaches used by McDonald's but in reality it is much more about the industry and the consumption habits of food consumers. The epidemic of obesity is attacked head on and with a vengeance.

We the viewer, are confronted with a variety of enlightening concepts, the marketing approach of these fast food businesses. The nutritional, or lack thereof, value of the food produced by these companies, their greed, health issues, and our own reluctance to do the things necessary to provide appropriate care not just for ourselves, but for our children. The lack of concern for the very same children who

run the risk according to the filmmakers of having a 1 in 3 chance, for persons under the age of 12, of developing diabetes. There are other interesting concepts that we learn, for example the effectiveness of the marketing ploys used on children. We see for instance in one scene where 6-year-old children are unable to recognize images of popular historical figures, figures such as George Washington. We even see in this scene where not a single 6-year-old child recognizes the image of Jesus Christ, yet, every child recognizes the image of, and becomes excited about the image of Ronald McDonald.

In the special features section of the DVD we are told that Ronald McDonald is in many ways, the same prototypical character as Joe Camel, the character responsible for attracting many children to cigarettes. The exception is that Ronald McDonald, who by the way you never see eating in a McDonalds commercial, draws children to unhealthy eating habits, and with foods that have little or no nutritional value.

As a viewer and consumer, I was moved by the portrayals and commentary in Super Size Me. I did not realize for example, that the meat in a hamburger from McDonalds in reality comes from upwards of a thousand different cows, and from up to 4 different countries. Those cattle are raised in feedlots that require a great deal of antibacterial supplements and antibiotics to prevent the disease that comes about from being raised in one another's feces.

The film also looks at the marketing tactics of fast food companies ... for example the use of Play Lands, Happy Meals, and Ronald McDonald to appeal to children. It's scary to think how much effect marketing has in forming a person's perspective--from food choices, to choice of dress, and even body image. We live in a culture full of illusions, but if they're real in our minds it's often our personal truth.

The movie has had a dramatic impact on the chains themselves. The fast food chains for example won't confess this, but I have to believe that the change in menus in many of those restaurants has come about as a direct result of this movie. Shortly after the release of this film, we begin to see things like salads, healthy choices on happy meals and other menu items, yogurt, and as of this week, I have even seen fruit options given at many fast food restaurants. One has to wonder though, is this because those companies are legitimately concerned over the health of its customers or because of the public pressure placed on them? We also have to be careful as the film makers point out as to the reality of the "healthy" alternatives. We learn for example that a parfait fruit yogurt from McDonalds with granola has actually more calories, carbohydrates and fat than does a Big Mac. We also learn that this is the case for some of the salads that are offered if using the dressing that comes with it.

McDonald's responded to what already is the fourth-highest grossing U.S. documentary with an advertising campaign. It ended its "super size" options six weeks after the film's debut, insisting the step was unrelated, and recently introduced a new line of "premium salads," including one that contains more calories than a Big Mac.

This documentary raises anew questions for we who believe one cannot live by bread alone, Why are so many of us eating ourselves to death when others cannot find adequate calories to survive? Are we getting "more with less" when it comes to nutrition by not monitoring the nature (calories, sodium and fat content, for example) of food we consume for the sake of convenience? And why is it that super-sized Christians are among the most prolific at condemning the sins of others?

The Bible teaches us that God created man in his image (Genesis 1:27) and that God saw that his creation was good. He made us to enjoy good things, including food and drink. But God didn't make us to over-indulge ourselves and focus on satisfying our material needs. God wants us to look after our bodies and use them to honour Him, rather than abusing them for our own benefit. After all, the Bible teaches us that we are all 'fearfully and wonderfully made' by God, which means our bodies are precious and therefore to be looked after, and that includes by considering carefully what we eat.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In an age when we have so much information at our disposal, why do we still make choices based on advertising and marketing?

How does our consumption of pop culture and our lack of Biblical reflection on said culture contribute to the excess in our society?

How does society dictate our consumption?

Morgan Spurlock puts his body on the line to prove a point. How as Christians do we sacrifice what we have and need for the cause of the Kingdom of God?

How does advertising affect you? Do you realise it affects you