

Slow Food

by Cheryl Chaffee



Cooking together is great quality time.

Fast food. We grab it on the go when we're in a hurry, when we just don't feel like cooking. It's easy, convenient, inexpensive, and, best of all, it's fast. But, as anyone who has seen the film *Supersize Me* can tell you, it is very bad for our health.

And not just our physical health. With each fast food meal, we are not only loading our bodies with salt, fats, sugar, and other empty carbohydrates, we are also sending ourselves an emotional message. We are depriving ourselves of a nurturing homemade meal, created with love. We are telling ourselves that we are not worthy to receive food that someone has taken time to prepare. We rob ourselves of the traditional foods that our families have made for hundreds of years, thus removing us further from our historical background and propelling us further into the one-size-fits-all model of suburbia. In addition, purchasing a fast food meal typically contributes to factory farming, underpaid workers, cruel treatment of animals, and corporate greed.

Wow, do a burger and fries really do all of that? According to "Slow Food," an international movement which began in Italy in 1986 that has spread to over 800 worldwide local chapters, it is not just the fast food industry, but a "fast life" syndrome that pervades society which disrupts our natural rhythms, dampens the senses, and threatens our environment. Everyone is in a hurry to be more productive, more efficient, bigger, better, faster. This hurry reduces the opportunity to savor pleasure, to develop taste and culture, to experience ourselves as we are. From the Slow Food USA website: "Slow Food USA believes that pleasure and quality in everyday life can be achieved by slowing down, respecting the convivial traditions of the table, and celebrating the diversity of the earth's bounty."

It is a challenge to try to slow down in our fast-paced world. Technology has taken us away from our natural rhythms and has propelled us

into an industrial future where we have lost touch with some of our basic instincts. For example, the foods we eat. Look at some packaged food in your kitchen, and read the list of ingredients. Even something as basic as a can of plain bread crumbs contains high fructose corn syrup, potassium sorbate, sodium and/or calcium stearoyl lactylate, ammonium sulfate, and calcium propionate. What are these ingredients? Shouldn't the ingredients just be "bread"? (Ironically, I bought the bread crumbs to make black bean burgers from scratch.) Do we really need all of these preservatives, conditioners, and flavor enhancers in our food? Even foods that are supposed to be "good for you," like frozen veggie burgers, are full of hard-to-pronounce pseudo-ingredients. For the sake of convenience, we have relinquished our common sense that we should put pure food into our bodies. We are loading up on chemicals every time we eat packaged foods.

So, what are some steps we can take to slow down our food and come back into balance with nature? For most people, it is not feasible to have a full sit-down meal, home-cooked from scratch three times a

day, or even once a day, but it is a goal to look forward to. Most families have more free time on weekends, so planning a homemade meal for Sunday dinner might be a good start. On Saturday, go to the local market and find fresh, preferably locally grown ingredients, and plan the next day's meal. Get the kids involved in the shopping and the food preparation; it's a great quality time to share with them, since you are not only working together but taking the time to talk with them about their week. If you are preparing a traditional dish, talk about the family heritage or fond memories of preparing foods with your parents or grandparents.

Choose packaged foods wisely. Check the ingredients list. Just because something says "natural" or "vegetarian" doesn't necessarily mean it is good for you. If you can't pronounce all of the ingredients, you probably shouldn't put it in the shopping cart.

Reduce the number of trips to the fast food drive thru. Having a weekly menu planned ahead of time can dramatically cut down on the "what's for dinner" dilemma that may result in a trip to the burger joint. When traveling, consider packing

a cooler with sandwiches, fruit, nuts, and other portable snacks.

Connect with the people who grow your food. Meet and talk to the farmers at the farmer's market. Join a Community Supported Agriculture co-op. Grow some of your own vegetables in a garden or containers. Even in the big-chain grocery stores, look for labels on foods grown in your state rather than shipped across the country.

If you have the opportunity, try some of the slow food techniques that your parents or grandparents may have used, like freezing, drying, or canning surplus fruits and vegetables from the garden or the market. You'll be making "convenience" foods for later, and you'll know all of the ingredients and love that went into them.

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