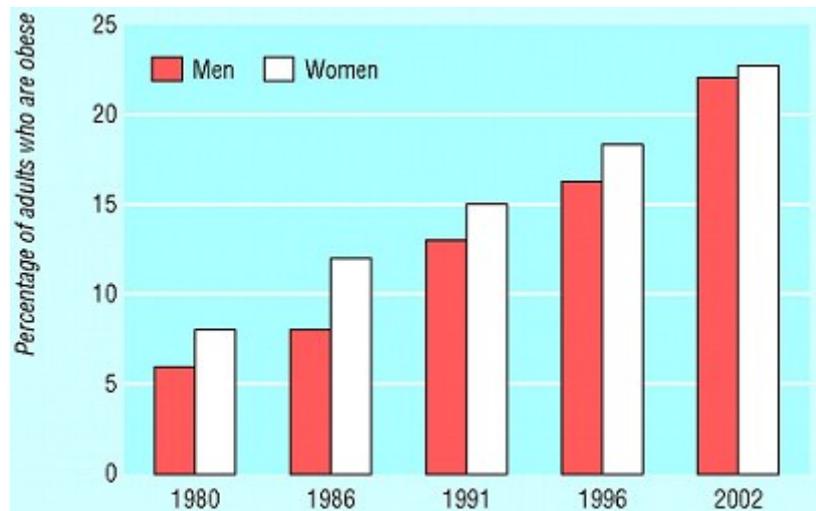


One of the most frequently cited idioms in the English language is “you are what you eat”. On reflection, the concept that what we consume is fundamental to our health and well-being is a pretty banal one. Nevertheless, promotion of this concept is surely at an all-time high, as evidenced by the prevalence and size of the dietary industry – the United States weight loss industry alone was worth \$59.7 billion in 2010,¹ and this was considered to be indicative that the industry was slowing down! – the highly visible healthy eating campaigns such as eating ‘five-a-day’ fruit and vegetables, the televised campaign of Jamie Oliver to get healthier food into schools, the massive success and enthusiastic critical reception afforded to *Supersize Me* and *Fast Food Nation*; a film and book respectively that critique the fast food industry. There are many other phenomena that would suggest that human health has never been a greater focus of human energy, and never has there been such analysis and effort put into conveying and absorbing the message that, indeed, we are what we eat.

Why are we so fat then? According to the National Center for Health Statistics, two-thirds of Americans are either overweight or obese.² While one may quibble about the definition of the terms ‘overweight’ and ‘obese’, and thus the validity of the statistics, nevertheless when one looks at the subject from any angle, one would find it very difficult to contest the assertion that Americans are getting fatter, not to mention Britons.

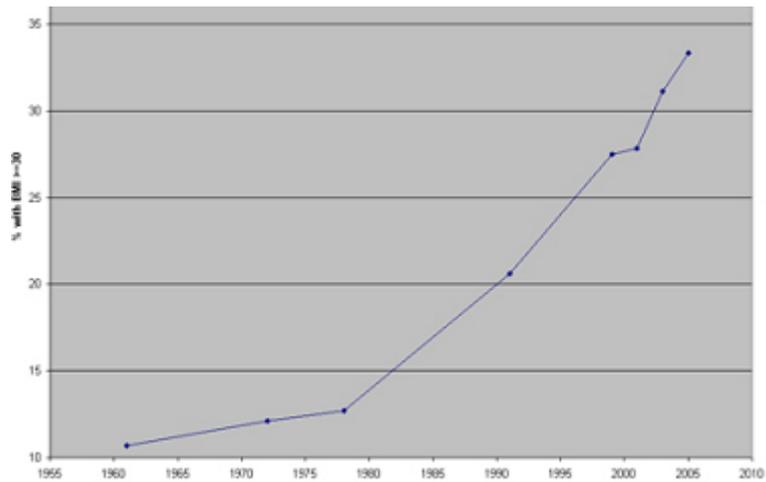
In January, 2008, the chief executive of McDonald’s – the fast food industry leader, and sole and premier subject respectively of *Supersize Me* and *Fast Food Nation* – Steve Easterbrook, suggested that video games were the main culprit in apportioning blame for the obesity epidemic. “There’s a lifestyle element: there’s fewer green spaces and kids are sat home playing computer games on the TV when in the past they’d have been burning off energy outside”.³ Easterbrook went on to proffer the usual tenuous argument that fast food companies advance when they’re confronted with criticism; namely that it was an issue of education, and that parents shouldn’t serve 1,300 calorie meals to kids. Of course, Easterbrook would defend to the hilt the rights of the McDonald’s corporation to sell those 1,300 calorie meals. It might also be worth pointing out that, as the author of *Fast Food Nation* and food industry activist Eric Schlosser points out “these companies fight, tooth and nail, against labelling. The fast food industry fought against giving you the calorie information. They fought against telling you if there is trans-fat in your food”,⁴ and when Morgan Spurlock the maker of *Supersize Me* attempted to obtain nutritional information in various branches of McDonald’s, he found that only half the franchises in Manhattan had the information posted on the wall, and 25% had no nutritional information in their restaurant at all.⁵ Doubtless, McDonald’s would respond to this by saying that they’ve changed their policy since then, and you can get nutritional information in all their restaurants now, and they now serve apples, and have cut out super-size portions. Of course, this is a completely disingenuous

argument, because if McDonald's were genuinely committed to the "education" of which they speak, they wouldn't have fought the compulsion to provide nutritional information so vehemently, and any changes they have made to their menus and corporate practice have merely been a piecemeal response to widespread public criticism.

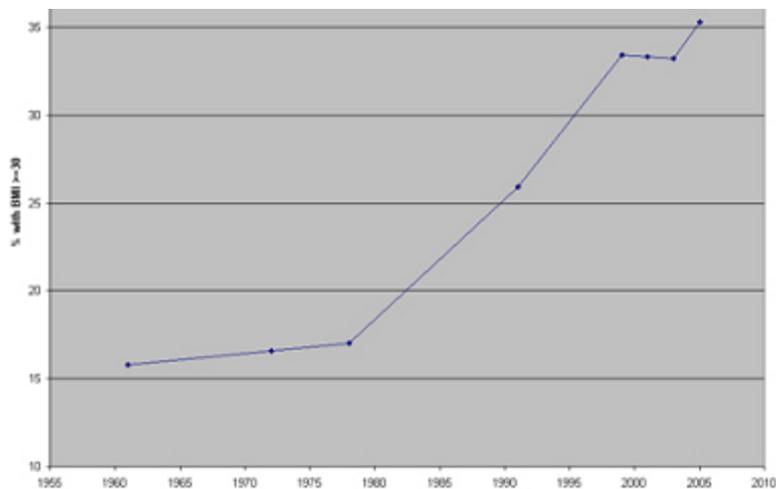


(Obesity in the United Kingdom 1980 – 2002, the trend has continued upwards since 2002)

And, inconveniently, regarding the laughable argument put forward about video games, all the data and evidence surrounding obesity would suggest that not only is it effecting people in demographics that would be unlikely to play a lot of video games, but also that this phenomenon pre-dates video games becoming the dominant form of leisure activity that they represent today. The fact is that obesity in men increased approximately 400% between 1980 and 2002 in the United Kingdom, and over threefold for men, and over 200% for women in the United States between the sixties and the present day. Approximately 35% of the US population can be considered obese. In addition, the parabolic curve in childhood obesity in both the US and the UK definitely pre-dates the widespread popularisation of video games. Furthermore, this trend is reflected throughout the so-called developed world, with virtually every nation that fits this description showing exponential growth in levels of obesity over the last forty years. Although, as in so many undesirable trends; the Anglo-American dyad leads the way. With the United States already established as unquestionably the lardiest nation on the planet, in September, 2010 it was reported that Britain had become the second fattest nation in the world, with nearly two-thirds of Britons being overweight.⁶



(Obesity in males in the United States from 1960 – 2005)



(Obesity in females in the United States from 1960 – 2005)

However, it is not merely an Anglo-American phenomenon. The German government launched an action plan in an attempt to reduce spiralling obesity rates by 2020.⁷ Two countries that British people would consider to be the epitome of good food, France and Italy, have both suffered from an increase in obesity levels in recent years, with *Le Figaro* reporting on “The Worrying Growth of Obesity in France”,⁸ and Italy has been reckoned to have the highest obesity rate in Europe.⁹ Elsewhere in Spain, a country generally thought of as being both active and in possession of an exemplary diet in Britain, childhood obesity has doubled in recent years.¹⁰ Even in Australia, which possibly has the most outdoor-oriented, active culture in the ‘developed’ world, obesity has more than doubled in the past twenty years.¹¹ One would have to say, there’s a hell of a lot of video game playing taking place!

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