

Hold the Fries, Please

Recent changes by McDonald's by no means upgrade fried foods to healthy treats.

Question: I try to watch what I eat, but occasionally I treat myself to some fast food. What do you think about the new "healthy" french fries being served by some food chains?

M.M., San Diego, California

Answer: I think it is important to pray before meals, not just for a blessing but also for protection from the things we choose to eat. In fact, we should pray, "And lead us not into fast-food restaurants and deliver us from french fries"!

Most restaurants use partially hydrogenated oils to fry their goodies because these oils produce crisp, good-tasting food at a low cost. But consumers are paying a steep price with their health.

Swedish researchers report that fried or baked foods high in starch—especially french fries—contain acrylamide, a chemical that increases the risk of cancer.

Also, overwhelming data has shown that hydrogenated oils contain a hydrogen bond called "trans" that seems to raise bad cholesterol (LDL) and lower good cholesterol (HDL).

That alone is a one-two punch for the hearts of the many, many millions of customers who dine on fast food every day.

I certainly agree that reducing trans fatty acids by 48 percent and increasing polyunsaturated fats by 167 percent—a

move announced recently by McDonald's—is a step in the right direction. But it by no means upgrades fried foods to the list of healthy treats.

The fast-food industry is trying to stay one step ahead of the Food and Drug Administration. The federal agency has new regulations in the works that could force restaurants to label foods that contain trans fatty acids.

It's a move that would most certainly benefit the informed consumer, whose numbers are growing every day.

If you think the use of a more healthful cooking oil—a changeover currently being implemented by many restaurants—will make fried foods more healthy, understand this: The caloric content is the same, and a new oil will do nothing to trim America's growing waistline.

I urge you to consider your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 6:19). Remember the Bible's cautionary words: "You may say, 'I am allowed to do anything.' But I reply, 'Not everything is good for you'" (1 Cor. 6:12, NLT).

Eat lots of God's fast food—the fruits and vegetables—and consume them as closely as you can to the form in which He has given them to us.

Question: Fall is here, and every Christmas I seem to be miserable with a sore throat and a fever. Should I get a flu shot this winter?

S.C., Chicago, Illinois

Answer: In general, I do not agree with vaccination, especially for healthy babies and young adults. For immunologically challenged adults, however, a flu shot could be lifesaving.

Influenza—the medical term for the common flu—is a seasonal respiratory disease that is in no way benign. It kills an average of 20,000 Americans a year.

The flu shot is a “killed virus” vaccine that results in some minor reaction, which includes local discomfort and a mild fever for a day or two. Dangerous complications occur in only one or two cases out of a million.

But if you have serious allergic reactions to either eggs or prior flu shots, or if you have a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome, you should avoid flu shots.

Remember, it’s a vaccine, not a treatment. If you already have the flu, it’s too late for the shot. Immunity takes two weeks to four weeks to develop.

I’m a firm believer that if your immune system is in good standing, you will enjoy better protection than any flu shot can give you. Eat healthfully, drink lots of water and supplement your diet with vitamins and minerals, particularly zinc. One of zinc’s essential roles is to help the immune system fight off a range of viral infections—from strep and influenza to herpes and the common cold.

If all else fails, take it as a God-sent break and enjoy a bowl of chicken soup. This meal-in-a-bowl will provide you with a powerful serving of nutrients in each spoonful.