

# Introduction

No one can tell me that I don't have balls. At age fifty-four, I turned a high school science experiment into a viral media sensation that resulted in a two-and-a-half-year contract with one of the world's largest franchisors, McDonald's. I endured jealousy from friends and colleagues who resented my fifteen minutes of fame, and I was the target of an aggressive "food advocate" whose petition against my presentation for McDonald's led to a barrage of social media attacks that had me fearing for my safety.

While I had the cajones to weather the whirlwind that was my life from January 2014 through December 2016, what I didn't know was that my testosterone levels were on the low end of normal. Like most middle-aged men, my body's supply of this essential hormone probably began decreasing in my thirties, bringing me to about half of what I had when I was in the prime of my life.

I was on an emotional high with the success of my McDonald's experiment, but I didn't know about the physical low that plagued me at the same time. I've since come to realize how dangerous having low levels of testosterone can be, for both men and women.

For guys, low testosterone doesn't just lead to a low libido. Insufficient testosterone is one of the major contributing factors to the deadly belly fat that often accumulates as we get older. We don't get those spare tires just from overeating! Low T can also result in poor cognitive function, and has been linked to serious conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and prostate cancer. As you'll learn later in this book, a shortage of testosterone in men makes death—from ANY cause—much more likely.

Women need testosterone, too, and while they don't need a lot of it, it needs to be in the right balance to keep their bones healthy, manage pain, preserve cognitive function, and even increase sex drive after menopause.

## The Pinnacle of Health Is Possible

After my experience with McDonald's ran its course, I began to think about what I could do to really make myself healthier. If I could lose 54 pounds eating nothing but McDonald's for six months, imagine what I could do if I looked for a food program specifically designed for my individual physiology to maximize health and combined it with a great exercise program!

One of the most important lessons I learned from my McDonald's experiment was that it felt a whole lot better to weigh 226 pounds than it did to weigh 280. So, after my commitment to the Golden Arches came to an end, I decided to try to make myself as healthy and as strong as I could possibly become.

This new experiment has been so wildly successful for me that I just had to share the news. So now I'm on a mission to reach as many people as possible with the message that the Fountain of Youth is real. Anyone who can't see how a few simple choices are game changers when it comes to health and vitality has got to be a few fries short of a Happy Meal!

I know that eating right and exercising isn't easy, but I'm here to tell you about a training regimen that fits into any schedule and a healthy diet that tastes good and lets you eat mass quantities of food.

At fifty-eight years old, I'm stronger, healthier, and happier than I've ever been in my life. I can deadlift 385 pounds. My romantic life with my wife of thirty-seven years is fifty shades of awesome. And, at a time when most guys my age are dreaming of a leisurely retirement, I'm working two jobs, writing books, speaking all over the country, and helping men and women just like me find practically unlimited energy by making better choices about exercise and nutrition.

I'm not here to brag about myself. I'm no different than anyone else. And if I can reach my own personal pinnacle of health, you can do it, too. While I'm proud of my accomplishments, the real reason I talk about them is to inspire people—specifically YOU, my friend—to take charge of their own lives and live them to the absolute fullest.

## Strength by Numbers

I've always loved science, because data doesn't lie. The reason my McDonald's project went viral is because the results were real and went beyond my obvious and significant weight loss. In addition to the 54 pounds I lost, my ongoing blood work through the course of the experiment kept moving in the right direction.

Ninety days into the experiment my total cholesterol was down 32 percent, my triglycerides were down by 49 percent, my LDL was down 34 percent, and my cholesterol-to-HDL ratio dropped by 20 percent.

My current health and fitness experiment is also data driven. You'll not only see the results of my blood work, but I'll also impress you with some phenomenal strength gains achieved by a middle-aged guy who never lifted a weight before. Just take a quick look at how much I improved in four months in the core exercises that make up my new program:

- Military Press—130% strength increase
- Bent Over Row—150% strength increase
- Bench Press—153% strength increase
- Deadlift—170% strength increase
- Squat—182% strength increase

While the raw data is compelling in and of itself, it's really the real-life impact that provides the true meaning behind an experiment like this. In my current journey, I've met lots of people who've used the techniques I've been applying to my own life to better themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

### How Far Can You Take Yourself?

As human beings, we have the potential to use better health to improve so many important aspects of our lives. In this book, I'm going to share some powerful stories from my own life, and the lives of others, to show you what's possible and inspire you to

achieve great things. I'm driven to find answers to many of the problems men and women face at any age, particularly as we get older. You know, things like these:

- How can we feel relevant in the career world?
- How can we rekindle romance?
- How can we win at the wonderful game of life?
- How can we maximize our time spent exercising?
- How can we eat for optimal health?
- How can we deal with the haters in the world?
- How can we handle fame and notoriety?

In addition to being a story about my journey toward ultimate healthfulness, this book is also a commentary on the media machine that tells us what's cool, what's good, what's inappropriate, and what's controversial.

I'll take you through the highs and lows of the years I spent as a McDonald's brand ambassador. You'll learn why I was kicked out of schools, why franchise owners are among the best people on the planet, and how a company can try too hard to craft the "right" message.

And with no more connections to McDonald's, or any other entity, I'm going to explain some of the secrets I've learned about losing weight, gaining muscle, increasing testosterone, becoming stronger, and never being afraid to take a chance in life.

I'm living proof that you're never too old to reinvent yourself or take on new challenges that can lead to incredible personal growth. It all comes down to making informed choices that fit your age, condition, and lifestyle, and committing to those choices because the rewards of making them are so great.

## Tap Into the Power of Choice

This idea of choice was often lost on people who heard about my McDonald's experience. Certain individuals were so conditioned to believe that fast food was bad that they couldn't see the simplicity of my experiment. Basically, all I was saying was

that if you limit your calories to around 2,000 a day—after years of eating between 4,000 and 5,000 calories a day—you’re going to lose weight.

McDonald’s was just the attention-getting vehicle for this very mundane and logical fact. Indeed, it was the unique context of my particular experiment that definitely put people in two opposing camps. For McDonald’s supporters, especially the network of owner/operators around the world, I was a godsend. Finally, they had a counter argument against Morgan Spurlock’s popular 2004 documentary *Super Size Me*.

But for people who hated McDonald’s specifically, and fast food in general, I was the Antichrist. People who never met me or took the time to investigate what I was really saying launched a campaign that would eventually prevent me from speaking to kids in middle and high schools, despite the fact that the hundreds of teachers and thousands of students who had already seen me speak not only got my message of balance and personal accountability, but also gave me high marks for it.

Despite all the naysayers, my message is basically the same as it’s always been—that the choices we make in life largely determine our outcomes.

If you can understand this, then you’re way ahead of a lot of people. But don’t let the simplicity of this message fool you. If you can make good choices with intention, and if you can keep doing so, you can make powerful changes in your life.

You’re making a choice right now to read this book, and hopefully it will lead to a good outcome for you. You can choose to follow my program in a quest to become healthier, or you can choose some other program that works for you. You can even choose to think I’m an idiot and throw the book away, but I really hope you don’t do that.

Maybe the choices you make will work for you, maybe they won’t. But even choices that don’t get you the results you want can be teachable moments. That’s why I love data and rely on it so much. If my blood work goes bad, or if my strength gains disappear, I can make new choices in the form of adjustments. These might be small or they might be large, but I always have an opportunity to correct course.

## Join Me on the Path to a Stronger, Healthier, More Youthful You

Regardless of what you choose to do, I hope I can inspire you to make good choices when it comes to living your best, loving your best, eating your best, and functioning at your best in a strong, healthy body.

I've discovered an exercise program and a food plan that have helped me gain energy and vitality, as well as lean muscle and increased testosterone. This is a total program that's working wonders for me, and I encourage you to talk to your doctor to see if it's right for you, too.

I can't stress how important it is to have a doctor to consult. I've had the same doctor do my blood work since I started my McDonald's experiment in 2013. As you'll see in the pages that follow, he's been a great resource for me, as were numerous other doctor friends.

It's my sincere hope that you can find your own Fountain of Youth that you can drink from for the rest of your days. Whether you follow my program or find another one that works for you, I hope that I can leave you with the knowledge that only YOU are in charge of your destiny. Only YOU can make the choices that will bring you a better life. Only YOU can push your limits, rise above your critics, and forge the change you want in your world, whether it's a healthier body, a better love life, a more interesting career, or just the freedom to be yourself despite anything anyone else has to say about it.

Let's get started!

# Chapter One

I Proved That Fast Food Isn't Fat Food  
But There Are Still People Who Don't Believe It!

Conventional wisdom is funny. Sometimes things that are accepted as true are factual, but sometimes they aren't.

Take fast food, for example. If you ask most people, they'd probably admit that it's not the healthiest food out there. The idea that fast food is bad for you has become conventional wisdom, and that made it easy for documentary filmmaker Morgan Spurlock to find great success with a 2004 movie called *Super Size Me*.

This admittedly compelling movie showed what people believed all along—that if you eat fast food, you're going to get obese, lose energy, feel like crap, and dramatically increase your risk of a heart attack, liver damage, and other life-threatening and expensive medical conditions.

What Morgan Spurlock did was provide evidence that fit conventional wisdom about fast food, and the creative way he did it really hurt McDonald's. Under pressure from the movie's message, the fast-food giant eliminated its supersize options just six weeks after the film's release and began adding healthier menu items at about the same time. More than ten years later when I came on the scene, the McDonald's owner/operators I encountered all told me that I was the answer to Morgan Spurlock they'd been looking for all that time!

Spurlock became the very public spokesperson for a long list of people who wanted to vilify the fast-food industry in general and McDonald's in particular. Passionate people really believed that McDonald's and other fast-food chains were responsible for America's obesity epidemic, and the fact that these heartless companies marketed food to kids made the whole industry's crimes that much more heinous.

Morgan Spurlock actually got the idea for his film while watching a news report about parents who were accusing McDonald's of making their two teen daughters obese. Never mind the fact that the report was actually about the judge dismissing the lawsuit!

## Spurlock Had an Agenda, and So Did I

When *Super Size Me* hit the theaters—big purveyors of popcorn, candy, hot dogs, pretzels, and other unhealthy foods by the way—the war on McDonald's and fast food intensified. What people didn't seem to understand about the documentary, however, was that all the physical problems Morgan Spurlock developed over the course of his thirty-day McDonald's consumption were related to the choices he made, not to the food itself.

Spurlock's experiment was designed to paint McDonald's as the bad guy. He didn't follow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) dietary guidelines for calories or for any of the key nutrients for which the government provides recommendations. Instead, he decided he would agree to eat more food whenever a McDonald's employee asked if he wanted to supersize his order. In a free society, no one has to answer yes to that question every time it's asked.

But Spurlock had an agenda, which is fine. He was fit and healthy to begin with, and it wouldn't have been much of a story if he stayed fit and healthy after eating McDonald's. For stories to be compelling, people have to undergo dramatic change. And Morgan Spurlock wanted his health to get worse.

So he ate more than he normally did. A lot more. And it made him throw up. It made him gain weight. And it affected his liver. *Super Size Me* didn't show me that fast food is bad—it showed me that if you make bad choices with fast food, you could damage your body.

I rarely ate fast food before my McDonald's experiment. In fact, I didn't need fast food to gain excess fat. I was perfectly happy overeating at fine restaurants and binging on food obtained at the grocery store. Trust me, if you eat too much of ANY food, I can guarantee that you'll eventually become obese.

When I did my McDonald's experiment, I also had an agenda. Not to say that McDonald's food was healthy, but to prove Morgan Spurlock wrong by making different choices with the same food. It's not the food that's bad, it's the choices we make with the food we have available that can hurt us. I'm not saying it's easy to make good choices, but it certainly is possible if you put your mind to it. What Morgan Spurlock and I both did was to show how different choices can lead to very different outcomes.

## I Didn't Set Out to Be Controversial

I never dreamed there'd be so much controversy over the simple experiment I conducted. I just wanted to demonstrate, through empirical data, that it's possible to lose weight even if the only thing you eat is fast food.

To refresh your memory, from October 1, 2013, through March 31, 2014, I ate nothing but McDonald's for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and I lost 54 pounds—the equivalent of a small child. When I started the experiment, my stomach measured fifty-one inches around. To put that in perspective, that's pretty much the circumference of a hula hoop.

By the end of the six months, I had slimmed down to a waist size of forty inches and had to buy all new pants. It didn't happen because I was eating at McDonald's all the time. It happened because I was eating at McDonald's all the time and *limited* my calories to about 2,000 a day.

The McDonald's menu was simply my grocery store for half a year. And I had a lot more healthy options to choose from than Mr. Spurlock did ten years earlier. Egg White Delights and oatmeal were among my favorite breakfast choices. I had salads and Fruit 'N Yogurt Parfaits for lunch. But I wasn't shy about eating burgers and fries for dinner, and I sometimes treated myself to some ice cream. Everything was fair game as long as I stayed within my daily calorie count. In fact, I ate better at McDonald's for six months than I did for years before I started the experiment.

My outstanding weight loss and impressive blood work proved conclusively that food is not the cause of the obesity epidemic in this country. Yet critics of what I was doing just

couldn't see the message. They were either blinded by conventional wisdom, or invested in destroying McDonald's for selling what they perceived as unhealthy food.



My before and after photos during my McDonald's experiment. I lost a total of 54 pounds eating nothing but McDonald's for six months.

Even before my experiment became a national media sensation, I should have seen the controversy coming. People at my school in Colo, Iowa, couldn't believe that I lost 54 pounds eating 540 meals at McDonald's. Even though I was shrinking

before their very eyes, several of my colleagues—all smart, well-educated individuals—let their preconceived notions of fast food blind them to the truth of what I was doing.

The controversy escalated exponentially when my experiment made me famous. You might have seen my exchange with Joy Bauer, a health and nutrition expert and contributor on the *TODAY* show. On national television she berated me for consuming too much sodium during my McDonald's experiment. While my sodium intake was definitely something I couldn't keep within the FDA dietary guidelines, it seemed odd that she would focus on that so intently instead of on all the other positive aspects of the project. In fact, sodium was the only nutritional factor of the fifteen we tracked that fell outside the guidelines in a potentially negative way. Most of the other fourteen, including fat, cholesterol, fiber, calcium, and even sugar, were either within a few percentage points of the FDA number or were outside the range in a positive way.

Joy seemed like she had to find a way to reveal how evil it is for the fast-food industry to use sodium to preserve their food. I'm not sure if it's evil, but if it is, it's a necessary ingredient that comes along with processed food. In my individual case, the extra sodium wasn't really a factor because I'm not salt sensitive and I've always had perfect blood pressure.

And quite frankly, new research has come out about salt that suggests that the current dietary guidelines may not be correct. I refer you to a *New York Times* article from May 8, 2017, called "Why Everything We Know About Salt May Be Wrong," which explains how "new studies of Russian cosmonauts, held in isolation to simulate space travel, show that eating more salt made them *less* thirsty but somehow hungrier. Subsequent experiments found that mice burned more calories when they got more salt, eating 25 percent more just to maintain their weight."

I'm going off on a tangent here and I want to bring you back to my story and all the controversy it created. Things got really bad when I became a brand ambassador for McDonald's and started speaking at schools across the country. I'll explain more about this in the next chapter, but a self-described food advocate led an entire campaign to shut me down and prevent me from

speaking at schools because she believed I was encouraging kids to not only eat fast food, but also consume mass quantities of McDonald's!

Before this person came after me, I had already spoken at about a hundred different schools. And I have to tell you that I never heard once from a teacher or student that they felt free to binge on fast food. It was quite the opposite. My message of choice and balance was the one that resonated, and that's why I repeatedly got standing ovations and positive feedback and letters from every audience I spoke to.

I totally understand that fair-minded people can disagree about the effects of fast-food marketing and the intentions of fast-food chains, but to claim that the only reason McDonald's does its charitable work, educational work, and anti-bullying outreach is to increase market share is the ultimate cynicism. I have no reason to doubt it when people claim to be concerned parents. But guess what? I'm also a concerned parent, and so are the thousands of people who own and work at McDonald's franchises.

### Are You Smarter Than a Seventh Grader?

When I got back to Colo after my whirlwind media trip to New York, a student in my seventh grade life science class raised her hand to ask me a question. When I called on her, she said, "Mr. Cisna, we're having a hard time understanding all of this. Isn't all you and the sophomores did nothing more than common sense? Why is this such a big deal?"

She was so right. Why was this McDonald's experiment so big? All we did was follow government dietary guidelines, for goodness sake! I find it funny that seventh graders have it figured out but I would spend the next three years of my life trying to convince the rest of the world of the same thing.

I explained to this young lady, and to the class as a whole, that she was right. I said that many people spend too much time clinging to long-standing beliefs and refuse to be open to the fact that they might actually be wrong. The empirical data from my experiment really made it tough for people, because how can you

argue, or rationalize, beliefs that don't coincide to the data?

## Teachers Can Learn Lessons Too

I'm the first to admit that I'm a simple man who did a simple experiment to expose the fallacy of the conventional wisdom around fast food, and show people that they could lose weight by making better choices. I never once claimed that McDonald's food is nutritious or not nutritious. I never encouraged anyone to eat more fast food or less fast food. All I set out to do was show that our choices have a huge impact on every aspect of our lives.

In hindsight, I probably shouldn't have put my daily meals in the first book I wrote. It kind of gave the impression that I was advocating an all-fast-food diet plan, when all I really wanted to do by showing everything I ate was satisfy people's curiosity and the need for transparency. I was also hoping to point out that if you found yourself in a pinch, you could put together a diet of fast food for a day or two that wouldn't adversely affect your life. So I put every one of the meals, along with the corresponding caloric information, in the back of my book.

Even though I had a disclaimer in the book, McDonald's got nervous about it when we were in negotiations about how we might work together.

It was actually one of the first things that came up when we started talking. They wanted all publication stopped and any unsold inventory pulled.

The funny thing was that I wrote the book with their knowledge prior to our agreement, but they never provided any input because they didn't think I'd get it published in the time frame I told them we would. I told them I wanted to have the book done in seven weeks and they thought that was impossible. Large corporations move a lot slower than highly motivated individuals trying to capitalize on unexpected media attention, so, needless to say, they were shocked when I showed them the finished product and told them I had plans to publish it in paperback and electronic

formats. The book was way down the road and there was no turning back.

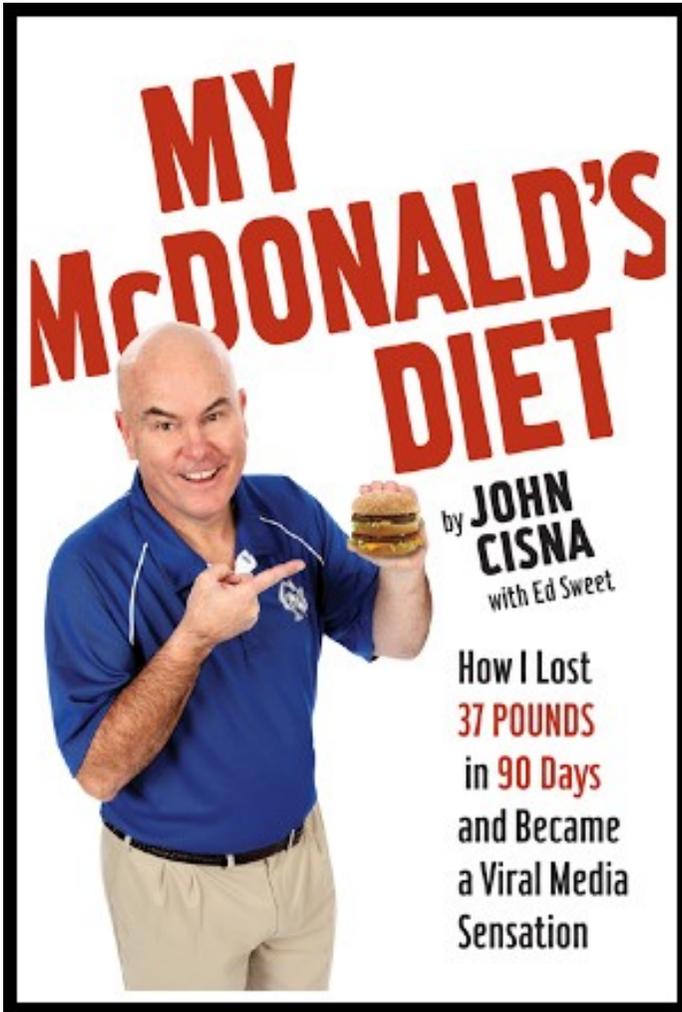
I understood where they were coming from when they told me to pull the book, and it was the first inkling I got about the different set of rules and regulations that big companies like McDonald's have to abide by. I found out very quickly that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) enforces many regulations regarding diet claims, and evidently my book broke every one of them!

As an individual I was fine, but if I were connected with the corporation in any way, the book would have caused multiple legal headaches for McDonald's. This was just one of the many lessons I'd learn as I embarked on the new chapter of my life as a McDonald's brand ambassador, and I'll tell you about it all in the next chapter.

### Healthy or Not? You Decide.

I still get asked quite often if I think McDonald's food is really healthy. My answer is simple. All foods have a "health" factor. The challenge for each one of us is to find out what foods will give us the right balance of nutrients, taste, pleasure, etc. If we make good choices overall, we can make room for some treats for healthy lives we fully enjoy. Even the strictest diets allow a little bit of cheating, and if that means you decide to go and get a Big Mac once in a while, is that really so bad?

Not everything on the McDonald's menu is filled with salt and fat. Many of the chain's egg dishes, salads, chicken sandwiches, snacks, etc., are perfectly acceptable choices, even when consumed on a regular basis. Joy Bauer and others don't have confidence that people who go to McDonald's can avoid the seductive power of the menu items with the worst nutritional value. They think everyone who walks into McDonald's becomes magically mesmerized by the sights and smells of crispy fries and juicy burgers. They might be tempting, but the decision to choose those particular menu items consistently can't be the exclusive fault of the fast-food chain



My first book was pulled from the shelves when I started working as a McDonald's brand ambassador.

The one major point I tried to make with my McDonald's project is that we have to quit blaming fast food, or any other food, for our health issues. We all have many choices available to us. Nobody puts a gun to our heads and says, "Eat fast food or else!"

Do I continue to eat fast food today? Rarely, but on occasion I will.

If I were on the road and had to eat fast food would I pull over and eat at McDonald's? Without question I would! I've been fortunate enough to be behind the scenes at Hamburger University and various food-processing plants. I marvel at the care that McDonald's takes to ensure their foods are 100 percent safe for consumption, and I know that the company's menu items have a level of nutrition that's more than adequate for me in short-term situations.

Fast food isn't part of my regular food plan today, but I have to credit McDonald's for getting me on the road to better health. I wouldn't be as healthy as I am now if it hadn't been for my McDonald's experiment and how it all unfolded with the media flurry and my experience as a brand ambassador.

My challenge to you is to start thinking about the choices you're making, and evaluate what you're doing to see if you've found a path to overall health and happiness. Are you heading toward the best you possible, or are you getting lost in the woods? If you need a little redirection, I'm here to give it to you in the form of a program that works not just for my personal physiology, but for a lot of people I've met on my new journey to becoming as healthy as I can possibly be as a unique human being with a specific genetic makeup.

## Patience Is a Virtue

Part of our societal problem with weight control is that people want fast fixes rather than long-term success plans. Immediate gratification plays a huge role in people's decisions regarding weight loss. I've learned that whenever I see a plan advertised as losing "X" amount of weight quickly, I usually head for the hills, because short-term fixes do not set you up for long-term success.

My McDonald's experiment and the one I'm working on today have taught me that the key to successful weight loss is making a consistent commitment to real lifestyle change. Fortunately, I find it pretty easy to stick to something, and even

Thanksgiving didn't deter me from eating McDonald's back in 2013.

If there's one paramount piece of information that I can pass on about sticking to a new lifestyle plan it's this: BE PATIENT! You've got to get over that quick-fix mentality, because if you don't, you'll just get anxious and give up when you don't get the results you want fast enough.

During my McDonald's project, I made the mistake of weighing myself every day. I really freaked out on those days when, despite sticking to my plan, I actually went up in weight by a pound or two. Those fluctuations are natural, and when I went back and looked at my weight on a week-by-week basis, all the data points showed consistent weight loss.

Another tip is to avoid being swayed by pictures of people in advertisements who are absolutely ripped with muscles. Those people are at the far right side of the bell curve when it comes to the genes that govern physical appearance. Most of us are AVERAGE people, so instead of competing with the naturally gifted, just compete with yourself and enjoy the improvements you make every day.

Remember, you have exactly the same number of muscles that Mr. Universe has. Do what it takes to make the most of them and you'll enjoy long-term success that intertwines nicely with your everyday lifestyle.

## Fast Food Is Here to Stay

If we're being realistic about things, fast food won't be going away anytime soon. In fact, CNN recently released a study that shows how pervasive fast food is among every section of our society, from rich to poor.

The research revealed "the guilty pleasure of enjoying a McDonald's hamburger, Kentucky Fried Chicken popcorn nuggets, or Taco Bell burrito is shared across the income spectrum...with an overwhelming majority of every group reporting having indulged at least once over a nonconsecutive three-week period."

Our busy schedules make fast food the best solution at times, so I'm not surprised about the research at all. I'm not sure I'd call it a guilty pleasure, however, since sometimes it's not pleasurable at all and you're just in a hurry! For better or for worse, the genie is out of the bottle and fast food will ALWAYS be a part of everyday life. If people believe we could somehow snap our fingers and eliminate every fast-food restaurant on earth and thus eliminate obesity, they're seriously kidding themselves.

I honestly believe that even if fast food went away, our obesity problem would be much greater than it is today. My weight was out of control for most of my adult life and fast food was an extremely small part of my diet. I got fat from eating food from grocery stores and sit-down restaurants.

Using fast food as a scapegoat might be as convenient as eating at a fast-food restaurant, but it really doesn't get us anywhere. It all comes back to choice.

It took me six months of my life and 540 straight McDonald's meals to get on a path to health. The baseline I started at was pretty terrible. I weighed 280 pounds and had a cholesterol level of 249. My triglycerides were 156 and my LDL was 170.

All that is different now. Eating at McDonald's for six months inspired me to get even healthier, and that's why I'm sharing my experiences with you today.

So even though I know I'll never convince everybody, I hope you're one person who joins me in the belief that fast food isn't fat food.