

## What Does it Mean Living Near a Fast Food Outlet?

Previous studies have shown the poor nutritional value of fast food, and that eating fast foods is linked to a higher likelihood of fatal and nonfatal heart attacks. Despite this, there is rapid growth in the purchase and availability of fast food in most countries.

Research in The Netherlands and Australia was initiated to explore the role of fast food availability and the probability of having a heart attack.

Researchers in the Netherlands used three registries to track the health of nearly 2.5 million adults for one year. During the study, researchers tracked key health outcomes among participants including heart disease, stroke and heart failure. They then used home addresses to estimate how close participants lived from the nearest fast food outlet during that period.

Participants were at least 35 years old and free of heart disease at the start of the study. They also lived at the same address for a minimum of 15 years to help assess the long-term impact of their location in relation to fast food.

In total, 2.5% of participants were diagnosed with heart disease, stroke or heart failure during the one-year study. After analysis, researchers found that individuals living within a kilometre of a fast food outlet were significantly more likely to develop heart disease than those living further away.



This association existed even after accounting for factors like age, race and income, all of which influence cardiovascular risk.

In Australia, a study team led by Tarunpreet Saluja of the University of Newcastle, came to the same conclusion. This retrospective cohort study included 3,070 patients admitted to hospital with a heart attack in the Hunter Region between 2011 to 2013. The database contained each patient's home postcode, allowing the researchers to analyse their surrounding fast food environment.

The researchers recorded the total number of outlets within each local government area and compared different areas to analyse the association between density of fast food outlets and incidence of heart attack. They found that for every additional fast food outlet, there were four additional heart attacks per 100,000 people each year.

This research documents the association between fast foods, cardiac events, and the proximity of fast food outlets. It also highlights the need to have proximity to outlets providing healthy food options.

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