

THE FAT Tax

1 FOCUS ON THE TOPIC


1. Look at the photo of the fast food. Do you think this food is healthy or unhealthy? Why? What are some other kinds of fast food that you know?
2. Our eating habits mean the foods and ways we usually eat. What are some unhealthy eating habits? What are some problems caused by unhealthy eating habits?
3. Look at the title of the unit. What do you think it means?

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2 FOCUS ON LISTENING

LISTENING ONE THE NATION TALKS


VOCABULARY

- 1  Read and listen to the beginning of a radio show.


About 11 percent of the food Americans eat comes from fast food restaurants. And a lot of the food at fast food restaurants is **junk food**: soda, hamburgers, French fries—unhealthy foods that are high in salt, sugar, and fat. Many studies show that our **consumption** of junk food is related to one of the biggest **public health** problems in the United States today: the **increase** in **obesity**. People who are obese are extremely overweight—they weigh at least 20 percent more than what they should for their body type and height. And one of the main reasons that people are obese is because they eat too much fast food. To put it simply, Americans are too fat, and it is making them sick. Obesity causes some serious diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and some kinds of cancer. Obesity also costs a lot of money—in the billions of dollars a year in health care costs.

So how can we change our eating habits and **reduce** our consumption of junk food? For example, should the government put a **tax** on unhealthy foods to make them cost more? How can obese people **get rid of** the extra pounds that are slowly killing them? Do workplace programs to help people **lose weight** really help? Many programs **claim** to have the solution, but do they work? Can the government do anything to **discourage** Americans from eating so much junk food? What are the best ways to **deal with** the increase in obesity in the U.S.? That is the topic of today's show. We hope you will join the conversation, either by telephone or by joining our online discussion group.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1**  Listen to the whole radio show. Look again at your predictions from the Preview section. Were any of your predictions correct? Did your predictions help you understand the story?
- 2** Circle the correct answers.
 1. What is a fat tax?
 - a. It is a tax on people who are obese.
 - b. It is a tax on unhealthy foods that can make people obese.
 - c. It is a tax on fast food restaurants that serve junk food.
 2. What is the purpose of a fat tax?
 - a. To discourage people from eating food that can make them obese.
 - b. To pay for public health programs.
 - c. To make fast food restaurants stop serving unhealthy food.
 3. Which countries already tried a fat tax?
 - a. The United States and Great Britain (the United Kingdom).
 - b. Most European countries.
 - c. Two countries in Europe.
 4. Why did the government in Denmark get rid of the fat tax?
 - a. The tax did not improve public health.
 - b. The tax made food too expensive.
 - c. The tax was not high enough.
 5. Do fat taxes work?
 - a. There is not enough information yet to say for sure.
 - b. Probably not.
 - c. Yes they do, but businesses don't like them.

DETAILS

 Listen to the radio report again. Then read each statement. Write **T** (*true*) or **F** (*false*). Then correct the false statements.

- ___ 1. Roberta Anderson is a food researcher.
- ___ 2. Fat taxes only raise the price of junk food.
- ___ 3. Hungary got rid of its fat tax.
- ___ 4. Shoppers and business owners in Denmark disagreed with the fat tax.
- ___ 5. People from Denmark shopped in Germany because the food was better there.
- ___ 6. Studies show that a fat tax in the United States might help people lose weight.
- ___ 7. One study showed that a 20 percent tax on soda could reduce obesity by 3.5 percent.
- ___ 8. A tax on pizza and soda could help Americans lose up to 18 percent of their body weight.
- ___ 9. The fat tax may be one of the reasons that the consumption of butter, margarine, and oil went down in Denmark.
- ___ 10. The economy¹ in Denmark was strong when the fat tax was introduced.

¹ **economy:** the system by which a country's money and business is organized


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MAKE INFERENCES

HEDGING

An inference is an educated guess about something that is not directly stated. To make an inference, use information that you understand from what you hear.

Reporters are careful about the words they choose because their job is to report the facts. As a result, they often use *hedges*. Hedges are phrases and words that people use to avoid expressing an opinion. People also hedge to avoid making a statement about something that is not certain. From the language and the tone of voice that someone uses, you can infer that he/she is hedging.


-  Listen to the example. Listen to the words and the tone of voice. What does the reporter mean?

Example

HOST: Do you mean that they got rid of the tax because of the costs, not public health?

REPORTER: Well, yes—at least that’s what many people believe.

In the example, the speaker uses the words “at least that’s what many people believe” to hedge. Although she says “yes,” you can infer by her tone of voice and the words she uses—“at least” and “many people believe”—that she is avoiding expressing her own opinion; she is just reporting what others are saying.

-  Listen to the excerpts. What does the reporter mean? Circle the correct answer.

Excerpt One

- a. The reporter disagrees with what the researchers claim.
- b. The effect of the taxes is not certain yet, so the reporter does not want to say that taxes will make a difference.

Excerpt Two

- a. The reporter is saying that consumption of unhealthy food went down.
- b. The reporter is saying the fat tax caused people to eat less junk food.

EXPRESS OPINIONS

Work with two other students. Answer the questions. Give reasons for your opinions.

1. Do you think a fat tax is a good idea? Why or why not?
2. If some food costs more because there is a fat tax, will you still buy it? Why or why not?
3. Do you think a fat tax is the best way to deal with the public health problem of obesity? Why or why not?
4. What other ideas do you have for dealing with obesity?

VOCABULARY

Read the words and expressions in the box aloud. Then read the sentences and circle the letter of the answer that best explains the meaning of the boldfaced word(s).

absolutely
affect

be concerned about
be in favor of

take steps

1. **A:** Do you like Thai food?
B: **Absolutely!** It's my favorite kind of food.
 - a. Maybe.
 - b. Yes, very much.

2. Please don't cry! There is nothing to **be concerned about**.
 - a. worried about
 - b. interested in


3. I **am in favor of** classes on healthy eating in all schools. It is important that all children grow up with healthy eating habits.
 - a. like the idea of
 - b. am worried about

4. The food you eat can **affect** your health. That's why you should eat food that's good for you.
 - a. make a change in something
 - b. make someone healthier

5. You need to **take steps** to improve your eating habits. Here is a list of things you can do.
 - a. do something specific
 - b. spend a lot of time

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COMPREHENSION

 Listen to the second part of the radio show. Listeners call in with their opinions. Check (✓) the opinions that are true for each caller.

Caller One:

- ___ Too many adults are obese.
- ___ Obesity is a public health emergency.
- ___ I'm in favor of a fat tax.
- ___ Cigarette taxes didn't help reduce smoking.


Caller Two:

- ___ Fat taxes are not a good idea.
- ___ The government shouldn't control the food people eat.
- ___ The government shouldn't be concerned with public health.
- ___ Children should take steps to get rid of obesity.
- ___ Parents need to teach their children about healthy eating.
- ___ Schools need to educate students about healthy eating habits.

LISTENING SKILL

CLARIFYING

People sometimes need to ask for clarification—that is, they check to make sure that they understand what the speaker is saying or ask the speaker to repeat. Sometimes speakers repeat the information they heard, sometimes they ask questions, and sometimes they use certain expressions to ask for clarification. Listening for these expressions can help you to know that the speaker will confirm the meaning or explain more. If you didn't understand the speaker's point the first time, you will get a second chance to understand.


 Listen to the example.

Example

HOST: So, if I understand correctly, a fat tax makes unhealthy foods more expensive, and then fewer people buy them?

ROBERTA ANDERSON: Yes, exactly—the idea is to discourage people from buying food that can make them obese.

In this example, the host checks his understanding of the fat tax. He signals to the reporter that he wants to clarify by saying, “So, if I understand correctly . . .” Then he uses rising intonation at the end of his statement: “A fat tax makes unhealthy foods more expensive, and then fewer people buy them?” This rising intonation signals to the reporter that he is checking his understanding. The reporter answers, “Yes, exactly,” to confirm that his understanding is correct.

 Listen to excerpts from *The Nation Talks*. Write what the speaker says to clarify. Then listen for the first speaker's response. Did the second speaker understand correctly? Check if the understanding was correct or incorrect.

Excerpt One

Clarification: _____? _____?

Speaker Two's Understanding: Correct / Incorrect

Excerpt Two

Clarification: _____ taxing unhealthy food will change people's eating habits that much?

Speaker Two's Understanding: Correct / Incorrect

Excerpt Three


Clarification: Sorry, _____ you just _____ ...?

Speaker Two's Understanding: Correct / Incorrect

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CONNECT THE LISTENINGS

STEP 1: Organize

 Listen to excerpts from Listenings One and Two. Complete the chart with information you hear.

	TAX ON WHAT?	HOW MUCH?	RESULT?
BRITISH STUDY			<i>Obesity reduced by 3.5%</i>
U.S. STUDY		18%	
1990S TAX	<i>cigarettes</i>	<i>Cigarette cost increased by 50%</i>	

STEP 2: Synthesize

Work with a partner. Student A, you are a host on a radio show. Student B, you are a reporter. You are talking about how taxes can change people's behavior. Complete the conversation by using information from the chart above.

Example

A: So can you explain how taxes can change people's behavior?

B: Sure. For example, a British study shows that if you add a _____ tax on _____, you can reduce _____ by 3.5 percent.

A: Really? That's a lot!

B: Yes, but remember, it is just a study.

Now switch roles and talk about a different tax. You will need to change the conversation a little bit for each type of tax.

 [GO TO MyEnglishLab TO CHECK WHAT YOU LEARNED.](#)

3 FOCUS ON SPEAKING

VOCABULARY

REVIEW

Use the words and expressions in the box to complete the discussions. Then practice the discussions with a partner.

Discussion 1: Two parents at a meeting

absolutely	discourage	junk food
concerned about	get rid of	obesity
deal with	in favor of	

A: Can you believe that there are vending machines at the school that sell soda and other _____, like chips and candy?
1.

B: Really? That's crazy!