



540 MEALS: CHOICES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

TEACHERS DISCUSSION GUIDE

OVERVIEW

In 2013, high school science teacher, **John Cisna**, conducted a classroom experiment led by three of his sophomore students in which he ate exclusively at McDonald's for six months. The purpose of the experiment was to test the role of **choice and balance** in a diet, and in the end, he demonstrated that **it isn't where you eat, but what and how much that matters**. During the experiment, Cisna's students thoughtfully planned a daily menu for Cisna using nutrition information available on the McDonald's web site to ensure he made choices consistent with his diet and lifestyle needs, specifically:

- Students ensured that each day, Cisna stayed within a 2,000 calorie limit
- Students also tracked Cisna's daily intake of 15 key nutrients, including carbohydrates, proteins and fat
- Cisna also had to incorporate regular exercise, and began walking at least 45 minutes 4-5 days a week

After eating **540 carefully planned meals from McDonald's**, Cisna lost 60 pounds, improved his blood pressure and decreased his cholesterol, demonstrating how making balanced meal choices and incorporating regular exercise can help achieve your loss goals. The film, "**540 Meals: Choices Make the Difference**," documents his journey. John's story is not a weight loss plan and everyone has individual diet and lifestyle needs. In addition, no one is suggesting that eating at McDonald's will result in any health benefit. We do not recommend that anyone eat every meal at one restaurant every day for an extended period. Rather, John's story is about making informed and balanced choices no matter where you chose to eat.

IN THE CLASSROOM

"**540 Meals: Choices Make the Difference**" can be used in the classroom to help students learn that balance and choice can be applied anywhere, whether it be at a fast food restaurant or at the grocery store or in the high school cafeteria. The 20-minute film is meant to serve as a supplemental video to current food and nutrition curriculum, such as plans that incorporate Morgan Spurlock's "SuperSize Me," to demonstrate how **different choices can contribute to different outcomes**. In "SuperSize Me," Spurlock consumed more than double the amount of daily recommended calories for an adult and intentionally avoided exercise and physical activity. This approach and hypothesis, when shown alongside Cisna's approach and hypothesis, allow for a well-rounded discussion inside and outside the classroom that can help students apply critical thinking skills and learn more about the **importance of making balanced choices**.

The following provides some **recommended questions to ask students** after viewing the documentary to get the conversation started. These questions can also be shared with parents to **continue the discussion beyond the classroom**.

- What do you think John Cisna tried to prove in his experiment?
- Were you surprised by the results of his experiment?
- Do you think John Cisna could have had the same results if he had done his experiment using food purchased at a grocery store? What about another restaurant? Or the school cafeteria?
- How can you apply what you learned in the documentary to the meal choices and lifestyle choices you make each day?
- John Cisna's students used nutrition information from the McDonald's web site to inform his meal choices, how can you use nutrition information (either at a restaurant or a store) to help inform your meal choices?

Additional questions if shown with "Super SizeMe":

- What do you think Morgan Spurlock tried to prove in his experiment?
- Do you think Morgan Spurlock could have had the same results if he had done his experiment using food purchased at a grocery store? What about another restaurant? Or the school cafeteria?
- How is John Cisna's experiment different than Morgan Spurlock's experiment?
- Both men conducted a similar experiment, yet had very different outcomes? Why do you think this is?
- After viewing both films, what do you see as the role of choice in outcome?

