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Supersize us: upselling is fuelling the obesity epidemic, warns report

Consumers persuaded to scale up a meal or drink take on an extra 55% more calories on average – and a big annual weight gain, experts reveal.

Fast food and restaurant workers have described how they are trained and incentivised to upsell.

- 5 One in three people buys a larger coffee, more fries or added cream each week as a result of “upselling”, which experts say is fuelling the obesity epidemic.

Most people in the UK – 78% of those questioned in a survey – say they are asked in restaurants, fast food outlets and stores at least once a week if they want to “go large”, opting for more food or bigger portions, according to a report.

- 10 Those who succumb to upselling get an extra 55% more calories on average by paying just a fraction more: scaling up the meal or the coffee or buying a cut-price larger chocolate bar raises the cost by an average of 17%, says the report. Those calories add up to a weight gain of about 2.2kg (5lb) every year, it estimates. Young people aged 18-24 are the most likely to experience upselling, consuming an extra
- 15 750 calories a week that could potentially lead them to put on 5kg (11lb) of extra weight in a year.

The report comes from the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), together with Slimming World, who say upselling is a routine technique used to persuade customers to consume and spend more.

- 20 Upselling, says the report, is the act of persuading a customer to buy something additional or more expensive. “The term is a relatively new concept that has only been widely used since mass-marketing was introduced during the 1980s,” it says. “Studies have shown that when people are presented with larger portion sizes, they consume more and increase their calorie intake.”
- 25 “Obesity is the public health challenge of our generation and if not addressed urgently could tip over the point of no return,” said Shirley Cramer, chief executive of the RSPH.

By Sarah Boseley, adapted from *www.theguardian.com*, September 2017