

News Debate: Battle of the Binge

Should competitive eating contests be banned?

How many hot dogs could you eat in 10 minutes? The 2011 winner of Nathan's Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating Contest on Coney Island in New York City scarfed down 62 franks and buns!



AP Images
Joey Chestnut and Sonya Thomas celebrate their wins at the 2011 Nathan's Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating Contest.

Competitive eating is an increasingly popular spectator event. Major League Eating, the main group that organizes eating competitions, hosts about 80 events a year that feature participants devouring such foods as pizza, asparagus, baked beans, French fries, oysters, and pickles.

But not everybody is excited about the events. A group in Taiwan recently sought to curb competitive eating contests there. The group argues that competitive eating leads to health problems that could put a strain on Taiwan's health-care system. Others who oppose eating contests say that they set a bad example, especially for younger spectators.

However, many fans say the events have tremendous entertainment value. Supporters say that trained competitive eaters are aware of the risks involved and should be free to participate if they want.

Should competitive eating contests be banned? *Current Events* student reporters Dontaé Brown and Anuva Goel sank their teeth into the issue.

All You Can Eat

Ban competitive food eating contests? No way. The hot dog eating contest at Coney Island is a fan favorite. As many as 50,000 people attend this great event, and now it is televised on ESPN. This contest is very amusing and often extremely hilarious to watch.

In addition to being entertaining, eating contests can be great for the self-esteem of the competitors. While the competitors stuff their faces, people in the crowd chant the names of their favorite eaters. And when the time is up, the crowd lets out a loud roar for the winner. Nick Palmer, a student at P.S. 239 in New York City, says, "When I won my church bazaar's pie eating contest, I felt like a star! So many people cheered and clapped for me. It was great!" Not only do the competitors experience some fame, but often they are also awarded free items or monetary prizes of up to \$10,000 or more!

Eating competitions can also be great goal-setting activities. Joey Chestnut, a winner of the Nathan's hot dog eating contest and the number-one ranked competitive eater, told WebMD that it takes intense training, hard work, and discipline to win the contests. Those are great skills to learn in order to become successful in life.

Cut Back

The typical scene at a competitive eating contest includes participants, judges, an audience, and ambulances. Why are there ambulances? Competitive eaters are sometimes rushed to hospitals because of problems such as vomiting and ruptured stomachs. The contests also can cause long-term health issues. "Competitive eating [promotes] poor eating habits, which could lead to obesity," Dr. Naveen Mehrotra from Piscataway, N.J., says. "Obesity leads to many medical complications such as diabetes and heart disease." The unhealthiness of the events is one reason they should be banned.

Furthermore, as food competitions become a popular sport, thousands of fans are watching them for entertainment. Competitive eating as a source of entertainment sets an unhealthy example. "Food should be enjoyed and appreciated and not be an object for competition," Mehrotra says.

Finally, competitive eating contests waste food. There are 1 billion people worldwide who live in hunger. In 2009, Joey Chestnut ate 68 hot dogs and buns in 10 minutes. That is way beyond what his body needs. All that food could be better used if it were given to people who really need it.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How many eating competitions does Major League Eating host each year?

- A fewer than 50
- B about 80
- C nearly 100
- D more than 100

2. The passage shows two sides of this debate: Should competitive eating contests be banned? According to the passage, which one of these people is in favor of banning competitive eating contests?

- A Joey Chestnut
- B Nick Palmer
- C Sonya Thomas
- D Naveen Mehrotra

3. What can you most likely conclude about competitive eating contests after reading the passage?

- A Competitive eating contests will decrease in popularity next year.
- B Everyone who participates in the contests has severe health problems.
- C People disagree on whether or not the contests should be banned.
- D Most people agree that competitive eating contests are fun and exciting.

4. Read this sentence from the passage: "Competitive eaters are sometimes rushed to hospitals because of problems such as vomiting and ruptured stomachs."

In this sentence, the word **ruptured** means

- A burst
- B sensitive
- C weakened
- D shrunk

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to

- A explain why competitive eating contests are becoming so popular
- B present both sides of a debate about competitive eating contests
- C describe the intense training that competitive eaters go through
- D persuade Nathan's to stop holding their hot dog eating contests

6. Why did a group in Taiwan recently seek to curb competitive eating contests there?

7. How might banning competitive eating contests affect the Nathan's company? How do you know?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Many fans say trained competitive eaters should be free to participate _____ the eating contests.

- A for
- B and
- C on
- D in

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

After competitors finish stuffing their faces with food, fans in the crowd often chant the names of their favorite eaters.

Who? _____

Where? _____

(do) What? often chant the names of their favorite eaters

When? _____

10. Vocabulary Word: complications: diseases or conditions developing at the same time as another disease or condition.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
