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WHITE HOUSE

## Commentary: Even the First Lady's Allowed to Splurge on Food, You Know

You can eat healthy and still enjoy the occasional burger. So can she.



By **Rebecca Kaplan**

Updated: July 12, 2011 | 6:15 p.m.

July 12, 2011 | 5:39 p.m.



SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

First Lady Michelle Obama raises her glass during a toast by President Mauricio Funes of El Salvador at an official dinner at the National Palace in San Salvador, El Salvador, March 22, 2011.

It happens every so often.

First lady Michelle Obama -- whose signature issue in her position has been a reduction of childhood obesity and a promotion of healthy eating -- dares to indulge. In February, she threw a Super Bowl Party at the White House that featured bratwurst, kielbasa, cheeseburgers, and deep-dish pizza on the menu. A few weeks later, she -- gasp! -- ate some short ribs while on a ski trip with her two daughters.

People go nuts and label her a hypocrite. America's mom-in-chief couldn't possibly tell people to eat healthy out of one side of her mouth while sticking the occasional French fry into the other!

On Monday, the first lady visited Shake Shack, a burger chain that recently expanded to Washington. "Michelle Obama orders 1,700-calorie meal at Shake Shack," proclaimed the headline on a story from *The Washington Post*, which made it into the publication's afternoon e-mail update. Several other news outlets wrote about it, and it merited a mention on several cable shows.

"Typical know-it-all progressive socialist," wrote a commenter on *Politico Click's* [mention of the incident](#).

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9:30 p.m.

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**Get Out of the Comfort Zone**

July 11, 2011

Republicans and Democrats who listen to their political base risk missing the broader electorate's message.

"They're the first ones to legislate what you can do, and they're the first ones to pork out on everything they've restricted from the 'common' man."

Frankly, this pattern is getting ridiculous.

Michelle Obama doesn't tell people they need to ban certain foods from their lives. Like most nutritionists, she talks about the importance of moderation, willingly admitting her own weakness for French fries. "I like to talk about my obsession with French fries because I don't want people to think that 'Let's Move!' is about complete, utter deprivation," Obama told reporters on the one-year anniversary of her campaign designed to fight childhood obesity. "It's about moderation and real-life changes and ideas that really work for families."

Obama further clarified the problem was not the occasional indulgence, but the fact that eating junk food has become the norm, rather than the exception.

"The problem is when that fun stuff becomes the habit. And I think that's what's happened in our culture," the first lady told reporters at the event. "Fast food has become the everyday meal."

Her attitude is fully in line with the views of many nutritionists and dieticians.

"Banning foods from our lifestyle is not a message that is consistent with enjoying life," said Stacy Snelling, an associate professor of health promotion at American University. "That's a message of deprivation, and that is never successful."

Snelling said people were "once again overreacting" to the fact that the first lady treats herself to unhealthy food on special occasions. "I think in this day and age that when people are very hypersensitive about when someone learns that there's a health platform ... we expect that person to be perfect in every food choice. But food choices are driven by taste and I think good role models show that we live by those models of balance."

Or, in the words of Center for Science in the Public Interest Director of Nutrition Policy Margo Wootan, "So what?"

For some, Obama is acting as a good role model for reasonable behavior by promoting fruits and vegetables the majority of the time and having occasional indulgences.

"I think she says, 'I'm a real person who likes all types of food, and I try to eat well and enjoy the other time that it's OK to have the occasional splurge,'" said Florida registered dietician Susan Mitchell. "I think that's what we should all aim for."

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July 8, 2011

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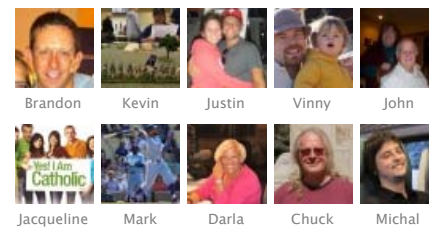
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