Food marketing and children’s dietary preferences: Literature update
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November 2014

Published November 2014 by the UK Health Forum for the Obesity Learning Centre
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The Obesity Learning Centre (OLC) is the nationwide centre for quality assured information for
everyone working in obesity. The OLC sets out to strengthen and support local capacity
and capabilities to treat overweight in children and adults.

The OLC is maintained by the Research Information Services team at the UK Health Forum and
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About this literature update

This literature update has been designed and carried out by qualified information professionals at the UK Health Forum in order to provide an update on published literature on the topic of food marketing and promotion and obesity.

The search carried out to prepare this update was not a systematic literature search, and was carried out purely for the purposes of delivering a brief update on the named topic. The aim of this update is to highlight open access research on the named topic. The body of the document contains links to open access research, while the ‘Further reading’ section contains details of content accessible by subscription only. If you require a comprehensive update on the named topic you are advised to carry out a systematic search using a full range of appropriate databases.

Readers should note that absence of evidence does not indicate absence of effect. The area covered by this update is an area where the amount and level of available evidence is still developing.

This update focuses on peer reviewed and commercially published research, with some unpublished or ‘grey’ non-commercially produced literature such as government reports, policy documents, or publications produced by organisations such as charities and NGOs. If you require a comprehensive update on grey literature for the named topic you are advised to include grey literature sources in your search.

The UK Health Forum produces a weekly news and grey literature update service and eLibrary called Prevention Information and Evidence. This eLibrary contains obesity and nutrition grey literature and is available from the Obesity Learning Centre website: http://www.obesitylearningcentre.org.uk/resources/prevention-information-evidence/

To assist the reader the results of the search have been presented in themes as follows:

1. Effect of advertising and branding
2. Advertising and promotion outside the home
3. Regulation of advertising
4. Online advertising
5. Television advertising

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Search results

The articles included in this update are open access. Follow links provided in PubMed to access full text.

1. Effect of advertising and branding

Access full text: [http://1.usa.gov/1yBZyaK](http://1.usa.gov/1yBZyaK)

**Aim:** To test the side effects of television food commercials on concurrent non-advertised sweet snack food intake in young children aged 8-12 y.

**Conclusion:** The main finding of our study was the interaction between commercial type and sex of the child. Food intake in boys was higher when they watched the food commercials than when they watched the neutral commercials, whereas food intake in girls was slightly lower when they watched the food commercials than when they watched the neutral commercials.

Access full text: [http://bit.ly/1xALrEa](http://bit.ly/1xALrEa)

**Aim:** This document reviews evidence to December 2008 on the global extent and nature of food promotion to children, and its effects on their food knowledge, preferences, behaviour and diet-related health outcomes. The review was commissioned by the World Health Organization (WHO) and updates a systematic review of the evidence conducted on behalf of WHO in 2006.

**Results:** Survey evidence confirms that many forms of food product promotions are popular with, and engage children. On-pack promotions, advertising, free gifts, and many other marketing techniques encourage interest and purchase. Research on recall of food advertisements in particular finds very high levels of awareness and enjoyment.

Access full text: [http://1.usa.gov/112aWBS](http://1.usa.gov/112aWBS)

**Aim:** To estimate the contribution of television (TV) food advertising to the prevalence of obesity among 6-11-year-old children in Australia, Great Britain (England and Scotland only), Italy, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United States.

**Conclusion:** Estimates of the average exposure of children to TV food advertising range from 1.8 min/d in The Netherlands to 11.5 min/d in the United States. Its contribution to the prevalence of childhood obesity is estimated at 16%-40% in the United States, 10%-28% in Australia and Italy and 4%-18% in Great Britain, Sweden and The Netherlands. The contribution of TV advertising of foods and drinks to the prevalence of childhood obesity differs distinctly by country and is likely to be
significant in some countries.

Access full text: http://1.usa.gov/1u54kN2

**Aim:** Targeted marketing of high-calorie foods and beverages to ethnic minority populations, relative to more healthful foods, may contribute to ethnic disparities in obesity and other diet-related chronic conditions. The authors conducted a systematic review of studies published in June 1992 through 2006 (n = 20) that permitted comparison of food and beverage marketing to African Americans versus Whites and others.

**Conclusion:** Eight studies reported on product promotions, 11 on retail food outlet locations, and 3 on food prices. Although the evidence base has limitations, studies indicated that African Americans are consistently exposed to food promotion and distribution patterns with relatively greater potential adverse health effects than are Whites. The limited evidence on price disparities was inconclusive.

Access full text: http://1.usa.gov/11knBkb

**Aim:** Health advocates have focused on the prevalence of advertising for calorie-dense low-nutrient foods as a significant contributor to the obesity epidemic. This research tests the hypothesis that exposure to food advertising during TV viewing may also contribute to obesity by triggering automatic snacking of available food.

**Conclusion:** Children consumed 45% more when exposed to food advertising. Adults consumed more of both healthy and unhealthy snack foods following exposure to snack food advertising compared to the other conditions. In both experiments, food advertising increased consumption of products not in the presented advertisements, and these effects were not related to reported hunger or other conscious influences.


**Aim:** This major study was the first ever systematic review to examine evidence of the effects of food promotion on children. It sought to answer the highly topical question of whether children’s food behaviour and diets are influenced by food advertising and other forms of promotion. Specifically, it reviewed evidence of the extent and nature of food promotion to children; how children respond to food promotion; whether it influences their food preferences; and if it does, the extent of that influence compared to other factors and whether the influence applies to types of food as well as brands.

**Conclusions:** The review reached a number of significant conclusions about the link between promotional activities and children’s eating behaviour. In particular, it concluded that food advertising to children does have an effect, particularly on children’s preferences, purchase behaviour and consumption, and these effects are apparent not just for different brands but also for different types of food. Since its publication in 2003, the report has acted as a catalyst to UK and European policy debate on this highly important public health issue.
Aim: To examine the effects of cumulative, real-world marketing and brand exposures on young children by testing the influence of branding from a heavily marketed source on taste preferences.

Conclusion: The mean +/- SD total taste preference score across all food comparisons was 0.37 +/- 0.45 (median, 0.20; interquartile range, 0.00-0.80) and significantly greater than zero (P<.001), indicating that children preferred the tastes of foods and drinks if they thought they were from McDonald's. Moderator analysis found significantly greater effects of branding among children with more television sets in their homes and children who ate food from McDonald's more often. Branding of foods and beverages influences young children's taste perceptions. The findings are consistent with recommendations to regulate marketing to young children and also suggest that branding may be a useful strategy for improving young children's eating behaviors.

Aim: We tested the associations of content types of children's television viewing with subsequent body mass index (BMI) to assess the plausibility of different causal pathways. We used time-use diary data from the Panel Survey of Income Dynamics to measure television viewing categorized by format and educational and commercial content. Analyses were stratified by age because children younger than 7 years are less able to understand the persuasive intent of advertising. BMI z scores in 2002 were regressed on television viewing, sociodemographic variables, mother's BMI, and BMI in 1997 (for older children only).

Conclusion: Among children aged 0 to 6 years in 1997, commercial viewing in 1997 was significantly associated with BMI z scores in 2002 in fully adjusted regressions. Among children older than 6 years, commercial viewing in 2002 was associated with 2002 BMI. These results were robust after adjustment for exercise and eating while watching television. The evidence does not support the contention that television viewing contributes to obesity because it is a sedentary activity. Television advertising, rather than viewing per se, is associated with obesity.
2. Advertising and promotion outside the home


**Aim:** Sponsorship income is a small piece of the Olympic funding pie, but exerts a disproportionate influence on the Games and on children’s eating habits. The Obesity Games report reveals the Olympic-related marketing tactics of Coca-Cola, McDonald’s and Cadbury’s, and how - even before a single medal has been awarded - they were already big winners of the Games. The report also criticises the increasing emphasis these companies place on “obesity-offsetting” – funding sports equipment and exercise schemes. This is just seeking to downplay the role diet has in obesity, rather than acknowledging that both increased activity and a healthier diet are vital.

**Conclusion:** The Obesity Games report finds that corporate sponsorship accounts for less than 10% of the total funding for the London2012 Games, and junk food sponsors contribute only around 2% of the IOC income. Yet sponsors like Coca-Cola, McDonald’s and Cadbury’s are given an unrivalled platform to promote their unhealthy brands and products. The Children’s Food Campaign concludes that the IOC should set proper conditions on promoting healthy eating in their sponsorship deals, and that junk food brands should be excluded from sponsoring all sporting events.


**Aim:** Prompted by the discovery that a leading brand of biscuits for babies and young children contained trans fats, the Children’s Food Campaign undertook a survey of foods marketed for babies and young children, analysing the nutritional information provided for 107 foods marketed for babies and young children available from UK supermarkets.

**Conclusion:** The UK baby food market is worth an estimated £315 million annually, and many food products marketed for babies and young children carry claims about their nutritional value, such as “added vitamins”, “contains calcium” or “no added salt”. However, our survey (conducted in 2009) showed that several popular products contained high levels of sugars and/or saturated fat, with some products containing levels of sugar or saturated fat higher than those in adult products widely considered “junk food”.

Access full text: http://bit.ly/1xQRPFB

**Aim:** Most children in the UK don’t eat a diet that is good for their health and meets dietary recommendations, and childhood obesity is at an all-time high. Food promotion in all its forms – on TV, websites, social media and via sponsorship of children’s heroes - influences what children choose to eat. To help tackle this problem, in 2003, the Food Commission launched a campaign, run by the Parents Jury, called “Chuck Snacks off the Checkout!”, calling for an end to the promotion of unhealthy food and drink products at supermarket checkouts. That campaign saw 3,500 checkouts in 300 stores surveyed and, in response, some companies reduced their promotions of junk food at their checkouts or added healthy options. However, following complaints from parents that the tactic seemed to be increasingly used by other high street retailers, we were prompted to revisit this issue.
Conclusion: We carried out a survey in 48 branches of 14 national supermarkets and high street chains. We examined the number of checkouts where food and drink was on display in each branch and assessed whether the food being promoted was healthy or not. Our survey found that food was regularly displayed at the checkouts and in the queuing areas in these stores, and the vast majority of food promoted was unhealthy, with few healthy options on offer. In many cases, the food was positioned to attract the attention of children – and was often within their easy reach. This junk food promotion is virtually inescapable for shoppers in these stores, and helps to ‘nudge’ people into less healthy behaviour. This undermines parents’ efforts to help their children eat a healthy diet and get the best start in life.

Access full text: http://1.usa.gov/1Ey9G6q

Aim: To analyse cross-promotions targeted to children and adolescents on packaging in the supermarket.

Conclusion: The number of products with youth-oriented cross-promotions increased by 78% during the period examined. Overall, 71% of cross-promotions involved third-party licensed characters and 57% appealed primarily to children under 12 years of age; however, the use of other forms of promotions increased from 5% of the total in 2006 to 53% in 2008, and promotions targeting pre-school and general audiences increased from 23% to 54% of the total. Only 18% of products met accepted nutrition standards for foods sold to youth, and nutritional quality declined during the period examined. Food manufacturers with policies limiting marketing to children represented 65% of all youth-oriented cross-promotions, their use of cross-promotions increased significantly, and the nutritional quality of their products did not improve. Some media companies did reduce the use of their properties on food promotions. Overall, the supermarket environment worsened due to an increase in cross-promotions targeted to children and adolescents and a decline in the nutritional quality of these products. This analysis failed to find improvements in food marketing to youth and highlights the need to expand current industry self-regulatory pledges.

Access full text: http://bit.ly/1zm2t8e

Aim: Recent research has shown that neighborhood characteristics are associated with obesity prevalence. While food advertising in periodicals and television has been linked to overweight and obesity, it is unknown whether outdoor advertising is related to obesity. To test the association between outdoor food advertising and obesity, we analyzed telephone survey data on adults, aged 18–98, collected from 220 census tracts in Los Angeles and Louisiana. We linked self-reported information on BMI and soda consumption with a database of directly observed outdoor advertisements.

Conclusion: The higher the percentage of outdoor advertisements promoting food or non-alcoholic beverages within a census tract, the greater the odds of obesity among its residents, controlling for age, race and educational status. For every 10% increase in food advertising, there was a 1.05 (95% CI 1.003 - 1.093, p<0.03) greater odds of being overweight or obese, controlling for other factors. Given these predictions, compared to an individual living in an area with no food ads, those living in areas in which 30% of ads were for food would have a 2.6% increase in...

**Aim:** The Children’s Food Campaign conducted a survey of the summer’s soft drink marketing campaigns in 2011 that are likely to appeal to children and their parents. We compared the products with their marketing messages, across a range of brands, and found that in several cases, companies were using misleading marketing to sell more soft drinks to children.

**Conclusion:** In 2010, UK consumption of soft drinks grew by 4.1 per cent to reach 14.6 billion litres. This means that the average person now consumes 234 litres per year or 642ml per day: the equivalent of almost two standard (330ml) cans. As a result the soft drinks sector grew by 5.8 per cent that year, to become a £13.9 billion industry, the fastest annual rate of growth in the last seven years. Manufacturers have been investing heavily in their products and their marketing through a range of tactics. This report shows that the soft drinks market is a lucrative one, and companies have millions of pounds to spend on marketing their products, including to children and their parents.

Access full text: [http://1.usa.gov/1v7vTsf](http://1.usa.gov/1v7vTsf)

**Aim:** Cross-country differences in dietary behaviours and obesity rates have been previously reported. Consumption of energy-dense snack foods and soft drinks are implicated as contributing to weight gain, however little is known about how the availability of these items within supermarkets varies internationally. This study assessed variations in the display of snack foods and soft drinks within a sample of supermarkets across eight countries. Within-store audits were used to evaluate and compare the availability of potato chips (crisps), chocolate, confectionery and soft drinks. Displays measured included shelf length and the proportion of checkouts and end-of-aisle displays containing these products.

**Conclusion:** The mean total aisle length of snack foods (adjusted for store size) was greatest in supermarkets from the UK (56.4 m) and lowest in New Zealand (21.7 m). When assessed by individual item, the greatest aisle length devoted to chips, chocolate and confectionery was found in UK supermarkets while the greatest aisle length dedicated to soft drinks was in Australian supermarkets. Only stores from the Netherlands (41%) had less than 70% of checkouts featuring displays of snack foods or soft drinks.
3. Regulation of advertising


**Aim:** In 2007, new scheduling restrictions on television food advertising to children in the UK were announced. The aim of the restrictions was to “reduce significantly the exposure of children under 16 to high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) advertising”. The authors explored the impact of the restrictions on relative exposure to HFSS food advertising among all viewers and among child television viewers, as well as adherence to the restrictions. We conducted two cross-sectional studies of all advertisements broadcast in one region of the UK over one week periods – the first (week 1) six months before the restrictions were introduced, and the second (week 2) six months after. Data on what products were advertised were linked to data on how many people watched each advertisement. Nutritional content of foods advertised was added to the dataset and used to calculate HFSS status. Relative exposure was calculated as the proportion of all advertising person-minute-views (PMVs) that were for HFSS foods.

**Conclusion:** 1,672,417 advertising PMV were included. 14.6% of advertising PMV were for food and 51.1% of these were for HFSS food. Relative exposure of all viewers to HFSS food advertising increased between study weeks 1 and 2 (odds ratio (99% confidence intervals) = 1.54 (1.51 to 1.57)). Exposure of children to HFSS food advertising did not change between study weeks 1 and 2 (odds ratio (99% confidence intervals) = 1.05 (0.99 to 1.12)). There was almost universal adherence to the restrictions.


This publication provides information on the marketing of foods and beverages to children and the changes that have occurred in the last decade. It examines trends in marketing methods and media platforms, reviews some of the recent policy action by WHO European Member States and provides a summary of recent scientific evidence related to the issue.

Chaloupka, F. J. (2011). **Public policy versus individual rights and responsibility: an economist’s perspective.** *Preventing Chronic Disease, 8*(5), A100.
Access full text: [http://1.usa.gov/1GS33zD](http://1.usa.gov/1GS33zD)

Interventions to reduce childhood obesity entail ethical considerations. Although a rationale exists for government to intervene in a way that limits individual rights while protecting the public’s health, a clear economic rationale also exists. The markets for goods and services that contribute to obesity are characterized by multiple failures that create an economic rationale for government to intervene (eg, consumers’ lack of accurate information regarding obesogenic foods and beverages). If effective public policies for reducing obesity and its consequences are to be developed and implemented, individual rights and government interests must be balanced.
Access full text: http://bit.ly/1xvFmYI

**Aim:** The objective of this research was to understand the perceptions of senior representatives from Australian state and territory governments, statutory authorities and non-government organisations regarding the feasibility of state-level government regulation of television marketing of unhealthy food to children in Australia.

**Conclusion:** Regulation of television marketing of unhealthy food to children was supported as a strategy for obesity prevention. Barriers to implementing regulation at the state level were: the perception that regulation of television advertising is a Commonwealth, not state/territory, responsibility; the power of the food industry and; the need for clear evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of regulation. Evidence of community support for regulation was also cited as an important factor in determining feasibility. The regulation of unhealthy food marketing to children is perceived to be a feasible strategy for obesity prevention however barriers to implementation at the state level exist. Those involved in state-level policy making generally indicated a preference for Commonwealth-led regulation. This research suggests that implementation of regulation of the television marketing of unhealthy food to children should ideally occur under the direction of the Commonwealth government. However, given that regulation is technically feasible at the state level, in the absence of Commonwealth action, states/territories could act independently. The relevance of our findings is likely to extend beyond Australia as unhealthy food marketing to children is a global issue.


The obesity epidemic cannot be reversed without substantial improvements in the food marketing environment that surrounds children. Food marketing targeted to children almost exclusively promotes calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods and takes advantage of children’s vulnerability to persuasive messages. Increasing scientific evidence reveals potentially profound effects of food marketing on children’s lifelong eating behaviors and health. Much of this marketing occurs in nationwide media (eg, television, the Internet), but companies also directly target children in their own communities through the use of billboards and through local environments such as stores, restaurants, and schools. Given the harmful effect of this marketing environment on children’s health and the industry’s reluctance to make necessary changes to its food marketing practices, government at all levels has an obligation to act. This article focuses on policy options for municipalities that are seeking ways to limit harmful food marketing at the community level.


The pressure to regulate the marketing of high-energy, nutrient-poor foods to young people has been mounting in light of concern about rising worldwide levels of overweight and obesity. In 2004, the World Health Organization called on governments, industry, and civil society to act to
reduce unhealthy marketing messages. Since then, important changes have taken place in the global regulatory environment regarding the marketing of food to young people. Industry has developed self-regulatory approaches, civil society has campaigned for statutory restrictions, and governments have dealt with a range of regulatory proposals. Still, there have been few new regulations that restrict food marketing to young people. Despite calls for evidence-based policy, new regulatory developments appear to have been driven less by evidence than by ethics.


Aim: Following the Bailey Review in 2011, on 9 May 2012 David Cameron announced a number of measures including, “asking the Advertising Standards Authority to consider whether more should be done to spell out the commercial intent of ‘advergames’ to young people and their parents.” No action has yet been taken. However, advergames and other digital and immersive forms of advertising have attracted a great deal of research time from academics around the world with over 60 studies from 12 countries appearing in top peer-reviewed journals in recent years on the effects of this type of advertising. This report examines the latest research evidence, summarises what we do and don’t know about the effects of advergames on children and makes recommendations for industry and regulators.

Results: Children as old as 15 do not recognise that advergames are adverts; Labelling initiatives have not been effective; Advergames work differently to TV advertising; Advergames persuade on a subconscious, emotional level; Advergames can change children’s behaviour without their conscious awareness; This raises fundamental ethical questions about the technique; Advergames are widely used for High Salt Sugar and Fat (HSSF) products; These products are banned around children’s TV programmes so HSSF advergames exploit a regulatory loophole; There is a serious health concern if children’s food choices are influenced subconsciously; Voluntary pledges for HSSF advergames have been proven ineffective; This raises questions for the self-regulation of children’s new media advertising.

Access full text: http://1.usa.gov/11kq0eJ

Aim: Obesity presents major challenges for public health and the evidence is strong. Lessons from tobacco control indicate a need for changing the policy and environments to make healthy choices easier and to create more opportunities for children to achieve healthy weights. In April 2011, the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention convened a consensus conference on environmental determinants of obesity such as marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children. The authors examine the political environment, evidence, issues, and challenges of placing restrictions on marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages within Canada.

Conclusion: A national regulatory system prohibiting commercial marketing of foods and beverages to children and suggest that effective regulations must set minimum standards, monitoring of compliance, and penalties for non-compliance are recommended.
Aim: A set of seven principles (the ‘Sydney Principles’) was developed by an International Obesity Taskforce (IOTF) Working Group to guide action on changing food and beverage marketing practices that target children. The aim of the present communication is to present the Sydney Principles and report on feedback received from a global consultation (November 2006 to April 2007) on the Principles.

Conclusion: The Principles state that actions to reduce marketing to children should: (i) support the rights of children; (ii) afford substantial protection to children; (iii) be statutory in nature; (iv) take a wide definition of commercial promotions; (v) guarantee commercial-free childhood settings; (vi) include cross-border media; and (vii) be evaluated, monitored and enforced. The draft principles were widely disseminated and 220 responses were received from professional and scientific associations, consumer bodies, industry bodies, health professionals and others. There was virtually universal agreement on the need to have a set of principles to guide action in this contentious area of marketing to children. Apart from industry opposition to the third principle calling for a statutory approach and several comments about the implementation challenges, there was strong support for each of the Sydney Principles. Feedback on two specific issues of contention related to the age range to which restrictions should apply (most nominating age 16 or 18 years) and the types of products to be included (31% nominating all products, 24% all food and beverages, and 45% energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods and beverages). The Sydney Principles, which took a children's rights-based approach, should be used to benchmark action to reduce marketing to children. The age definition for a child and the types of products which should have marketing restrictions may better suit a risk-based approach at this stage. The Sydney Principles should guide the formation of an International Code on Food and Beverage Marketing to Children.
4. Online advertising

Access full text: [http://1.usa.gov/112dfVt](http://1.usa.gov/112dfVt)

Proposed regulations targeting food marketing to children typically focus on traditional media, such as television, radio, and print ads. However, the widespread use of the Internet has promulgated novel food marketing strategies such as "advergaming," or the use of online games incorporating advertisements. In addition, the advent of so-called neuromarketing research is also allowing advertisers to appeal to the subconscious and emotional effects of food and beverage products, to which children may be particularly vulnerable. Current and future regulatory efforts should address the ubiquitous but often subtle marketing to which children are exposed and should measure success in terms of children's consumption of these products.
5. Television advertising


**Aim:** Childhood obesity around the world, and particularly in the United States, is an escalating problem that is especially detrimental as its effects carry on into adulthood. In this paper we employ the 1979 Child-Young Adult National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to estimate the effects of fast-food restaurant advertising on children and adolescents being overweight. The advertising measure used is the number of hours of spot television fast-food restaurant advertising messages seen per week.

**Conclusion:** Our results indicate that a ban on these advertisements would reduce the number of overweight children ages 3-11 in a fixed population by 10 percent and would reduce the number of overweight adolescents ages 12-18 by 12 percent. The elimination of the tax deductibility of this type of advertising would produce smaller declines of between 3 and 5 percent in these outcomes but would impose lower costs on children and adults who consume fast food in moderation because positive information about restaurants that supply this type of food would not be banned completely from television.


**Aim:** This study used content analysis to explore how much and what type of advertising is present in television programming aimed at toddlers and preschool-aged children and what methods of persuasion are being used to sell products and to promote brands to the youngest viewers. Four randomly selected, 4-hour blocks (9 am to 1 pm) were recorded in spring 2005 from each of 3 stations airing programming aimed specifically at toddlers and preschool-aged children (Public Broadcasting Service, Disney, and Nickelodeon). All content that aired in the spaces between programs was examined. Data recorded for food-related advertisements included the primary appeals used to promote products or brands, whether advertisements were aimed at children or adults, whether advertisements used primarily animation or live action, whether advertisements showed food, and whether licensed characters were used.

**Conclusion:** In 96 half-hour blocks of preschool programming, the 3 stations had a total of 130 food-related advertisements (1.354 food advertisements per half-hour). More than one half of all food advertisements (76 of 130 advertisements) were aimed specifically at children, and the majority of those were for fast food chains (50 advertisements) or sweetened cereals (18 advertisements). The primary advertising appeals used associated products with fun and happiness and/or with excitement and energy. Fast food advertisements in particular seemed to focus on building brand recognition and positive associations, through the use of licensed characters, logos, and slogans.
Aim: In the light of increasing childhood obesity, the role of food advertisements relayed on television (TV) is of high interest. There is evidence of food commercials having an impact on children’s food preferences, choices, consumption and obesity. The authors describe the product categories advertised during kids programmes, the type of food promoted and the characteristics of food commercials targeting children. A content analysis of the commercials aired during the kids programmes of six Swiss, one German and one Italian stations was conducted. The commercials were collected over a 6-month period in 2006.

Conclusion: Overall, 1365 h of kids programme were recorded and 11,613 advertisements were found: 3061 commercials (26.4%) for food, 2696 (23.3%) promoting toys, followed by those of media, cleaning products and cosmetics. Regarding the broadcast food advertisements, 55% were for fast food restaurants or candies. The results of the content analysis suggest that food advertising contributes to the obesity problem: every fourth advertisement is for food, half of them for products high in sugar and fat and hardly any for fruit or vegetables. Long-term exposure to this distortion of the pyramid of recommended food should be considered in the discussion of legal restrictions for food advertising targeting children.


Aim: While there is a recognized link between high levels of exposure to advertising of unhealthy foods and overweight and obesity among children, there is little research on the extent to which these exposures include persuasive marketing techniques. This study aimed to measure children’s exposure to the use of persuasive marketing within television food advertisements. Advertisements broadcast on all three commercial Australian television channels were recorded for an equivalent 1 week period in May 2006 and 2007 (714 h). Food advertisements were analysed for their use of persuasive marketing, including premium offers, such as competitions, and the use of promotional characters, including celebrities and cartoon characters. Advertised foods were categorized as core, non-core or miscellaneous foods. Commercial data were purchased to determine children’s peak viewing times and popular programs.

Conclusion: A total of 20,201 advertisements were recorded, 25.5% of which were for food. Significantly more food advertisements broadcast during children’s peak viewing times, compared to non-peak times, contained promotional characters (P < 0.05) and premium offers (P < 0.001). During programs most popular with children, there were 3.3 non-core food advertisements per hour containing premium offers, compared to 0.2 per hour during programs most popular with adults. The majority of advertisements containing persuasive marketing during all viewing periods were for non-core foods.
Further reading

Please note that the articles in this section of the update require subscriptions to access. The Obesity Learning Centre and the UK Health Forum regret that we are unable to supply Obesity Learning Centre users with full text articles at the present time.


Children’s Food Campaign (2013) Through the looking glass: A review of the topsy turvey world of the regulations that are supposed to (but don’t!) protect children from online marketing of junk food. *Children’s Food Campaign. London, UK*


Appendix: Search strategy

Resource limitations meant that only open access databases could be searched for this literature update. The following open access databases were searched:

- PubMed: http://www.pubmed.com
- Cochrane Library: http://www.thecochranelibrary.com/
- Google Scholar: http://scholar.google.co.uk/

PubMed & Cochrane Library MeSH search strategy


#2 "Food"[Mesh]) OR "Beverages"[Mesh] OR "Carbonated Beverages"[Mesh]

#3 "Obesity"[Mesh] OR "Pediatric Obesity"[Mesh]

#4 #1 AND #2 AND #3

Limits

- English language
- Humans
- Publication dates: 2004 – 2014

Search record

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