

# Impact on Children's Food Attitude and TV Advertising of Unhealthy Food

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## Editor note

Food advertising or marketing involves the 'use of conclusive ways and strategies to shape and impact children's food attitude, preference and consumption'. As illustrated, children are generally exposed to food advertising campaigns via technological devices and media, frequently in a way that's largely necessary. To combat this, nations around the world are beginning to theorise new programs to better safeguard children.

Getting children to eat healthy is much tougher than just saying "no" to junk food. Today's food environment makes it veritably delicate to feed children a healthy diet. Unhealthy food is everywhere, it's easy to get, and it's quick and frequently costs lower than healthy food. So-called "kids' foods" have poor nutritive quality they're especially high in added sugar. The most detrimental point of the food environment may be how these foods are retailed to children. This is a major public health concern.

Food marketing is everywhere. It's important, and it's effective. It's particularly effective for children and teens, who are a much more vulnerable audience.

## TV advertising of unhealthy food

Commercial television viewing is solely associated with adiposity in children (not just because it's a sedentary activity) and researchers conclude this link is probably due to advertising of unhealthy foods. The creation of unhealthy products not only encourages brand switching within a product category but increases consumption of particular categories of foods including fast food and soft drinks. It attracts new customers and establishes societal principles around acceptable and desirable foods. A study of English children aged 6 to 13 years found that children had a lesser preference for high-fat and high-carbohydrate foods (both ingrained and unbranded) after being exposed to food announcements, compared to when the same children were shown control advertisements on a separate occasion. The effect was greatest in children who had high regular levels of television viewing.

Experimenters have calculated that the average Australian 5 to 8-year-old, who watches around 80 twinkles of TV each day, is exposed to at least 827 advertisements or four hours of unhealthy food advertising on TV each year. An Australian study of children progressed 10 to 16 times plant exposure to TV advertising – not just the quantum of time spent watching TV – was associated with increased consumption of unhealthy food and drinks. The study found that the link between TV viewing and poor diet was strongest for children who watched the most commercial TV and were exposed to announcements at the time of broadcast or didn't skip through advertisements in TV recordings.

Australian children with a lower socioeconomic position are more likely to watch TV and for longer ages of time than those with a developed socioeconomic position.

## Other marketing of unhealthy food

While TV advertising of unhealthy food to children forms a large part of the evidence base for the impact of advertising on children, the effect of other types of marketing has also been studied. Product packaging that includes the presence of cartoon characters has been found to influence taste perceptions in young children. In one US study of children aged 4 to 6 years they believed a product with a cartoon character tasted better than the same food in a package without the character. In another US study, children aged 3 to 5 years tasted identical pairs of food and drink but felt they tasted better if they were in McDonald's branded packaging.

Sports backing also have an effect on children's preferences. An Australian study of 10 to 14-year-olds involved in local sport found high awareness of their clubs' sponsors, particularly when they were food and beverage companies. A majority of children in the study allowed their club's food and beverage sponsors were 'cool', and liked to return the favour to these sponsors by buying their products. Many of the children had received a voucher from a food or beverage company to reward good sport performance, or a sporting certificate displaying a food or beverage company logo.

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