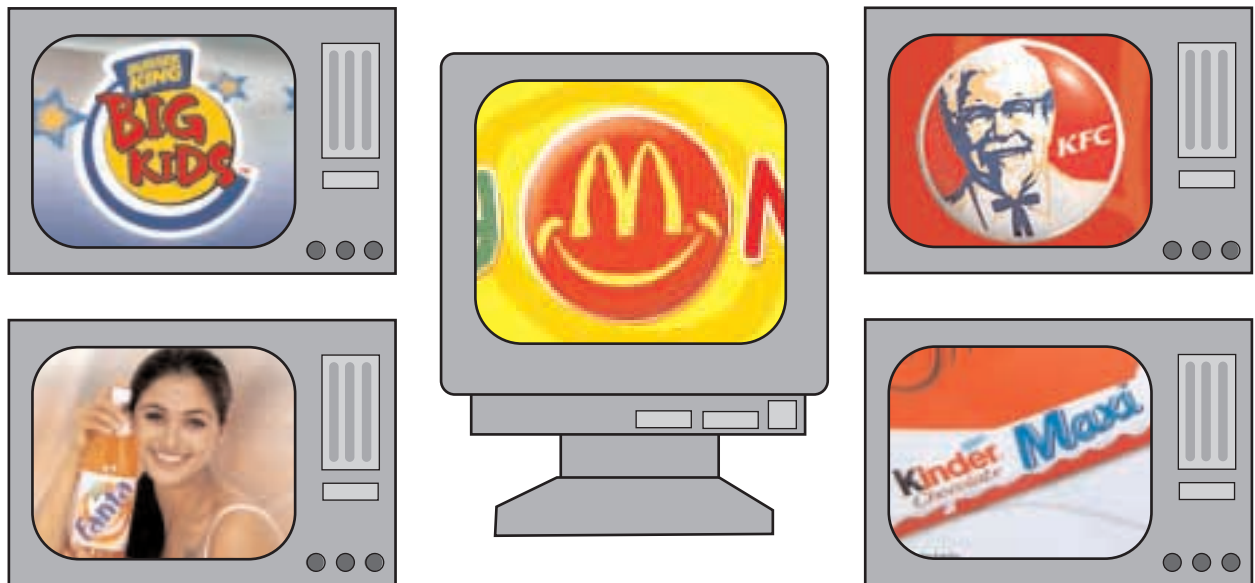


# Broadcasting bad health

Why food marketing to children needs to be controlled

A report by the  
International Association of Consumer Food Organizations  
for the World Health Organization consultation  
on a global strategy for diet and health



Text by K Dalmeny, E Hanna, T Lobstein  
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# Recommendations

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The world's children need greater protection from the marketing of energy-dense, low-nutrient foods. Experiences of marketing controls on tobacco and baby-milk show that voluntary marketing codes are unlikely to be adequate, and that stronger regulation is required. International standards are needed to provide a coherent framework to protect and promote children's health. We therefore urge the World Health Organization to:

- 1 Work with the WTO, FAO and Codex to ensure that all bodies are putting children's health protection *before* trade concerns.
- 2 Support international controls on food marketing, including controls on cross-border television, websites and email marketing.
- 3 Coordinate a Statement of Responsibility, backed by the best available evidence and expert opinion, outlining the rights and responsibilities of food manufacturers and advertisers, in order that companies marketing food are fully informed of the effects of their actions.
- 4 Monitor food-industry marketing practices, develop suitable targets at global and regional level, and assist in the development of the strategies needed to meet these targets.

The World Health Organization is also urged to assist and support national governments to:

- 1 Commit public resources to promoting the increased consumption of healthy foods and the reduced consumption of energy-dense, low-nutrient foods.
- 2 Involve non-governmental organisations, the medical community, consumer groups and young people in policy-making.
- 3 Restrict or ban direct and indirect advertising and promotion of energy-dense, low-nutrient foods to children.
- 4 Prohibit marketing of high-energy, low-nutrient foods and drinks in schools.
- 5 Pre-vet all TV advertisements for food, paying particular attention to those screened in the early evening, and also those which contain health, nutrition or nutrient claims.
- 6 Re-write existing rules or guidelines on food promotion to tackle the cumulative effect of marketing practices.
- 7 Enforce effective sanctions against food manufacturers and advertisers who contravene the restrictions on marketing to children.
- 8 Create incentives for food manufacturers to reformulate food products to decrease energy density and increase nutrient density.
- 9 Expand and create publicly funded health promotion initiatives that include nutrition education and media literacy.

---

'Individual change is more likely to be facilitated and sustained if the macro-environment and micro-environment within which choices are made supports options perceived to be both healthy and rewarding... Unless there is an enabling context, the potential for change will be minimised.'

WHO Technical report series 916 (2003)  
*Diet, nutrition & the prevention of chronic diseases*

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# Broadcasting bad health

Why food marketing to children needs to be controlled

A report by the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations for the WHO consultation on a global strategy on diet and nutrition.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported the rising incidence of obesity and chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes among the population worldwide. It has also acknowledged the links between many of these diseases and the pattern of food consumed.<sup>1</sup> However, as a WHO report<sup>2</sup> has noted, 'these concepts have not led to a change in policies or in practice'.

Policy development must address matters most likely to have a beneficial impact. To identify 'potential targets for interventions' the WHO report assessed the latest scientific evidence on the nature and strength of the links between diet and chronic diseases. On the evidence available, the report classified as 'probable' or 'convincing':

- The adverse effect of *high intake of energy-dense, low-nutrient foods*.
- The adverse effect of *high intake of sugar-sweetened beverages*.
- The adverse effect of *heavy marketing of energy-dense foods and fast-food outlets*.<sup>3</sup>

Although referred to as 'non-communicable' diseases, obesity, cardiovascular disease, cancer, osteoporosis, dental caries and diabetes are communicated through the cultural environment – from parents to children, from food corporations to consumers, from industrialised country to less-industrialised country.

The present report, from the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO), gives a consumer perspective on the extensive marketing of energy-dense, low-nutrient foods around the world. It calls for internationally effective policies that protect children from developing dietary habits that may result in disease and premature death.

'Marketing approaches matter for public health. They influence our own – and in particular our children's – patterns of behaviour. Given that they are designed to succeed, they have serious consequences for those at whom they are targeted.'

Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), in an address to the 55th World Health Assembly, 2002.

1. World Health Organization (2003) *World Health Report 2002*

2. WHO Technical report series 916 (2003) *Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases*

3. WHO Technical report series 916, *ibid*, section 5.2.4 'Strength of evidence', table 7, p. 63.

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# Section 1: Trends in diet and disease

Chronic conditions such as obesity, type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease and diet-related cancers are of increasing concern to governments in industrialised countries. In the US, for instance, the government's Centers for Disease Control have named obesity second only to smoking as a leading cause of preventable death.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, as a western-style diet high in fats, sugars and salt is adopted in less-industrialised countries (see figures below), western disease patterns are also emerging, threatening to undermine health gains made in the last 100 years. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes and childhood obesity rates are rising dramatically. More than 10% of the world's children are overweight, rising to over 30% in many industrialised economies.<sup>2</sup>

Treatment of these diseases is an expensive alternative to prevention. Less-industrialised countries lack the financial resources and infrastructure to implement effective treatment, especially as some countries are experiencing a the triple burden of continuing problems of widespread undernourishment and infectious diseases as well as the emerging problem of overconsumption of damaging nutrients.

Prevention of disease is essential, but requires a change in patterns of food supply and demand. Among other things, this will mean changes in marketing strategies and the promotion of health-enhancing foods.

'The obesogenic environment appears to be largely directed at the adolescent market, making healthy choice that much more difficult.'

WHO / FAO report of an expert consultation, 2003. 916: *Diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases*

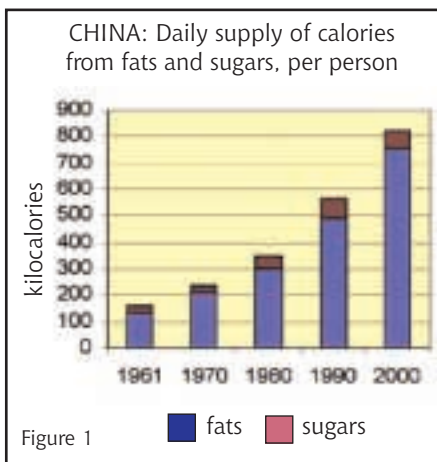


Figure 1

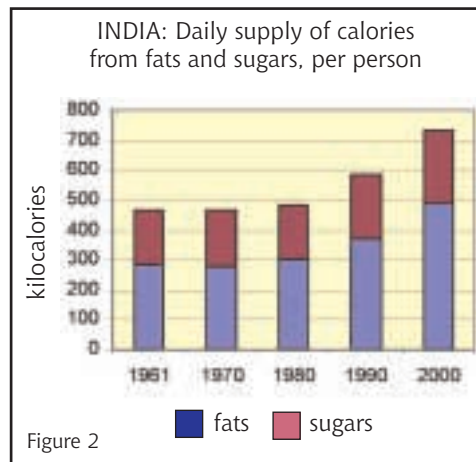


Figure 2

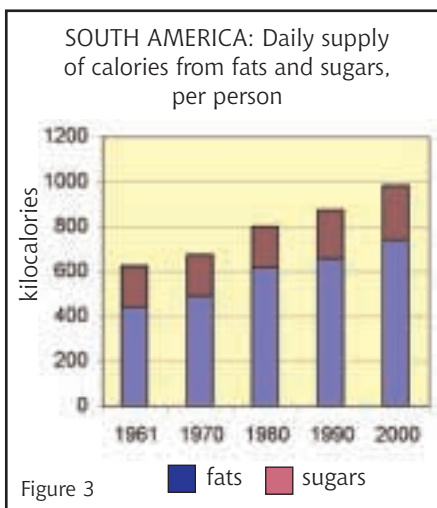


Figure 3

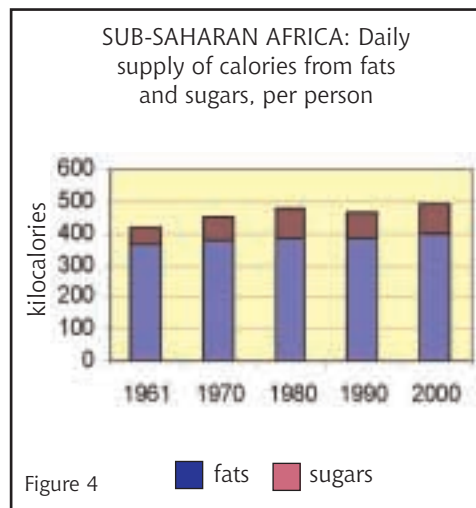


Figure 4

## Trends in consumption

Figures 1 to 4 show trends in the daily supply of calories from fats and from sugars, per person, in less-industrialised economies. These figures indicate that economic development is associated with a 'nutrition transition' towards diets high in fats and sugars. In this sample, only Sub-Saharan Africa (classified as a 'least-developed' region) shows fat, oil and sugar levels maintaining a low and relatively unchanging level.<sup>3</sup>

1. United States Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General (2001). *The Surgeon General's call to action to prevent and decrease overweight and obesity 2001*; [www.surgeongeneral.gov](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov)

2. International Obesity Task Force (2003) *Child and Adolescent Obesity*, [www.iodf.org](http://www.iodf.org)

3. FAO Balance Sheets: <http://apps.fao.org/page/collections?subset=nutrition>

# Trends in diet: Less-industrialised countries

It has been projected on a global basis that, by 2020, 60% of the burden of chronic diseases will occur in less-industrialised countries. A recent WHO report has highlighted that *'cardiovascular diseases are even now more numerous in India and China than in all economically developed countries in the world added together.'*<sup>1</sup>

Liberalisation of global markets, urbanisation, developments in food processing technologies, and intensive food marketing have all contributed to the trend in increased consumption of fats and sugar.

Food industries specialising in the very products that contribute the most to nutritional imbalance are planning to further increase their sales in less-industrialised countries. A recent industry report from Leatherhead Food Research Association has advised international food companies: *'As many food and drinks markets in regions such as Western Europe and North America reach saturation levels, multinational suppliers are increasingly looking elsewhere in the world to achieve or improve profitability.'* The report identifies Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Far East, Africa and the Middle East as growth areas for increased sales of snack food, beer, confectionery, convenience food, dairy products and soft drinks.

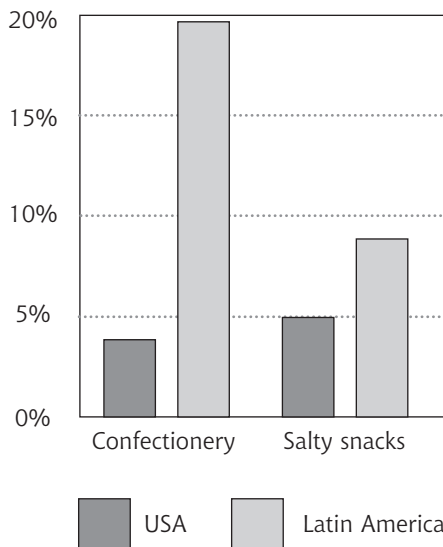
The report continues: *'Countries such as India and Russia are starting to experience significant growth, and have been highlighted by many of the world's largest food groups as important markets for the future. As a result, the developing world is likely to increase its share of the global food and drink market.'*<sup>2</sup>



'Considering the huge population in China, rising incomes and gradual westernising of the Chinese diet, there is clearly a big potential in the chocolate marketing sector. The value of the chocolate market is increasing by the rate of 10% yearly.'

China Market Research (2002) DSMR Ltd

**Growing the markets: Rapid growth in consumption of low-nutrient foods in Latin America compared with USA, 1995-2000**



**Changing diets in urban Brazil, 1962-1988**

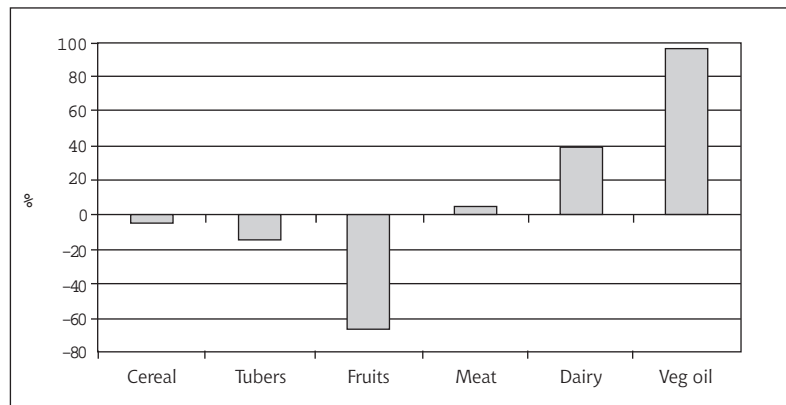


Figure 5 (left): 5-year growth in snack-food consumption, 1995 to 2000, comparing growth between the US and Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 6 (above): Changes (%) in the consumption of different food groups in seven Brazilian cities, 1962-1988.<sup>4</sup>

1. WHO press release (April 2003) Launch of the WHO/FAO joint consultation report on diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases

2. Leatherhead Food Research Association (2003) Market intelligence report

3. US Snack Food Association (2001) Five-year growth in snack-food consumption 1995-2000, World Trade Atlas

4. Mondini, L; Monteiro, CA (1994) Rev Saude Publica, vol 28

# How 'modernised' food supplies create unhealthy diets

Patterns of industrial development and investment can reveal underlying trends in the production, marketing and consumption of food. Southern and Eastern Europe, for instance, are two regions that have rapidly opened up to foreign investment and changes in agricultural production. Patterns of food supply in Southern Europe, home of the traditional 'Mediterranean diet', have changed since the 1960s, and are now increasingly similar to those found in Northern Europe, as shown in figures 8 and 9 (below, right).

In other parts of Europe, similar trends are evident. In Eastern Europe, much of the transition in food supplies is a result of Foreign Direct Investment in the region. Consumption of animal products in Eastern Europe has been high for several decades, while obesity incidence and cardiovascular disease and cancer mortality rates are significantly higher than in the European Union.

Dietary recommendations in Eastern Europe would include a significant rise in fruit and vegetable consumption as well as a reduction in energy-dense foods. However, an analysis by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (figure 7, below) illustrates that 60 per cent of Foreign Direct Investment in agri-food production is for sugar, confectionery and soft drinks. For every \$100 invested in fruit and vegetable production, over \$1,000 is being invested in soft drinks and confectionery.

Foreign investment will fund the increased production of fatty and sugary foods and provide marketing support for these products. It is highly likely that countries following a similar pattern of food-industry investment will see an attendant increase in diet-related diseases.

This trend, the 'nutrition transition', is recognised by both health and agricultural policy-making bodies (see FAO statement, right). It highlights the need for governments to change the food and health policies that affect both the production and marketing of food products.

'Farmers have given up subsistence farming of multiple crops that provide a more balanced diet in favour of a single high-yielding cash crop. Another element... is the increasing importation of foods from the industrialised world. As a result, traditional diets featuring grains and vegetables are giving way to meals high in fat and sugar.'

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (2000) *The nutrition transition and obesity*, web: [www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/obesity/obes2.htm](http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/obesity/obes2.htm)

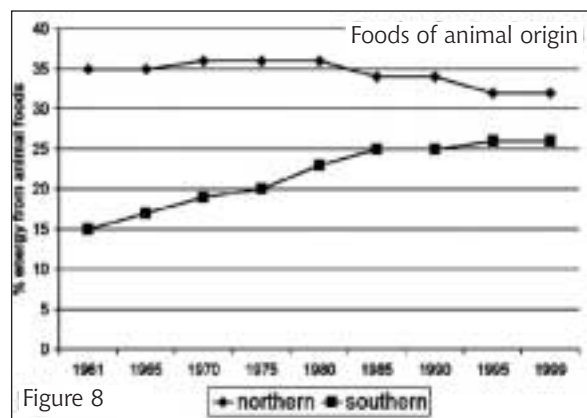
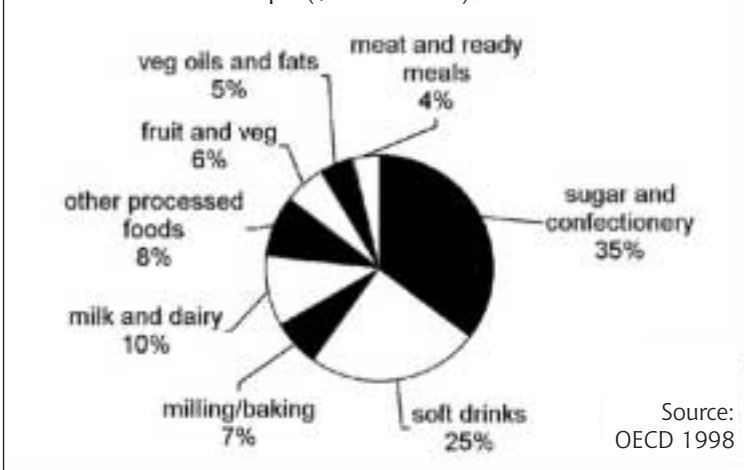


Figure 8

Figure 7: Foreign Direct Investment in agri-food production, Eastern Europe (\$4.04 billion), 1990-1997



Source: OECD 1998

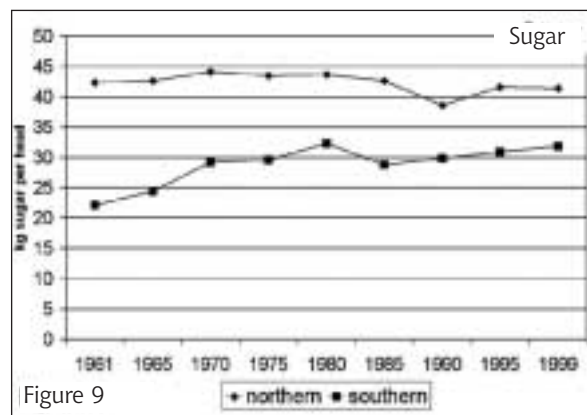


Figure 9

**The lost Mediterranean Diet: southern Europe is adopting northern Europe's diet of animal products (figure 8) and sugar (figure 9).** Source: The Food Commission

# Unhealthy food marketing: The scale of the problem

For every \$1 spent by the WHO on trying to improve the nutrition of the world's population, \$500 is spent by the food industry on promoting processed foods.<sup>1</sup> By 2001, the world food-industry advertising budget was estimated at \$40 billion, a figure greater than the Gross Domestic Product of 70% of the world's nations.<sup>2</sup>

Manufacturers know that children are particularly susceptible to the persuasion of advertising. Indeed, the Supreme Court of Canada recognised this in 1989, when it held that the Quebec Consumer Protection Act's prohibition on advertising directed at children under the age of 13 did not unduly limit constitutionally protected free expression. The Court stated that: '...advertising directed at young children is per se manipulative. Such advertising aims to promote products by convincing those who will always believe.'<sup>3</sup>

Specialist conferences now advise industry how to develop sections of the children's market, and how to manipulate the child's 'pester power' – known in the US as the 'nag factor' (see below).

Frequent exposure to marketing messages, along with changes in social circumstances, such as children's increasingly independent spending power, contribute to a nutritionally 'toxic' or 'obesogenic' environment – that is, environments that predispose children to desire and be able to obtain and consume certain foods, especially those that are energy-dense and low in nutrients.

In 2002 and 2003, reports by the investment bank UBS Warburg<sup>4</sup> and the international share analyst JP Morgan<sup>5</sup> warned some of the top-spending food advertisers (including Hershey, McDonald's, Tate & Lyle, Cadbury's, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Heinz and Nestlé) that they may be contributing to the obesogenic environment (see page 23). In 2002, Datamonitor had identified food advertising targeted at children as one of the top five causes of childhood obesity.<sup>6</sup>



Above: Some advertisers admit that an important factor in their marketing campaigns is to manipulate children to nag their parents for products. This full-page advert appeared in the UK grocery trade press. It tells retailers that the strength of a major UK brand for processed coated turkey shapes lies in 'successfully harnessing pester power'.<sup>7</sup>

'Children are much easier to reach with advertising. They pick up on it fast and quite often we can exploit that relationship and get them pestering their parents.'

Colegrave, S. of Saatchi & Saatchi marketing consultancy which specialises in marketing to children, quoted in *The Guardian* (November 22, 1999) *Should our children be spared Ronald?*

1. Lang, T & Millstone, E (eds) (2002) *The Atlas of Food*, Earthscan Books, www.earthscan.co.uk.

2. Analysis based on GDP figures for 2002 from the *World Bank Statistical Indicator* (2003)

3. Consumer Protection Act, RSQ, c. p40.1, ss.248, 249 and the Regulations Respecting the Application of the Consumer Protection Act ss. 87-90

4. UBS Warburg (November 2002) *Absolute risk of obesity: Food and drink companies not so defensive?* London: Global Equity Research

5. JP Morgan (April 2003) *Food manufacturing. Obesity: The big issue*. Geneva: European Equity Research

6. Datamonitor (2002) *Childhood Obesity: How obesity is shaping the US food and beverage markets*



In recent years, marketing to children has become a specialist and well-financed subject, with dedicated conferences, trade reports and publications. Above: IQPC runs Kid Power conferences around the world, with presentations that use the language of disease such as 'viral marketing'. Middle: Reuters advises companies how to target children. Right: Advertisers focus on 'marketing to pre-school kids'.

# Unhealthy food marketing: The scale of the problem

The growth in obesity, the upward trend in consumption of sugars and fats, investment trends in the snack food, confectionery and sugary soft-drink industries (see also page 4), and the increase in number of fast-food outlets – all show a strikingly similar pattern of rapid and accelerating growth.

Although the majority of advertisers' spending (over 80%) is focused on markets in North America, Europe and Japan,<sup>1</sup> in the past 20 years money spent on food marketing in less-industrialised countries has grown dramatically, particularly in Latin American and Asia. Even though McDonald's profits are currently poor, the company expanded rapidly between 1991 and 2001,<sup>1</sup> with the number of McDonald's restaurants rising from:

- 0 to 103 in South Africa
- 11 to 503 in the Middle East / North Africa
- 1,458 to 6,748 in Asia
- 212 to 1,581 in Latin America
- 15 to 631 in Central and Eastern Europe
- 1,302 to 5,146 in Western Europe

Figure 10: Ten-year growth in number of McDonald's restaurants

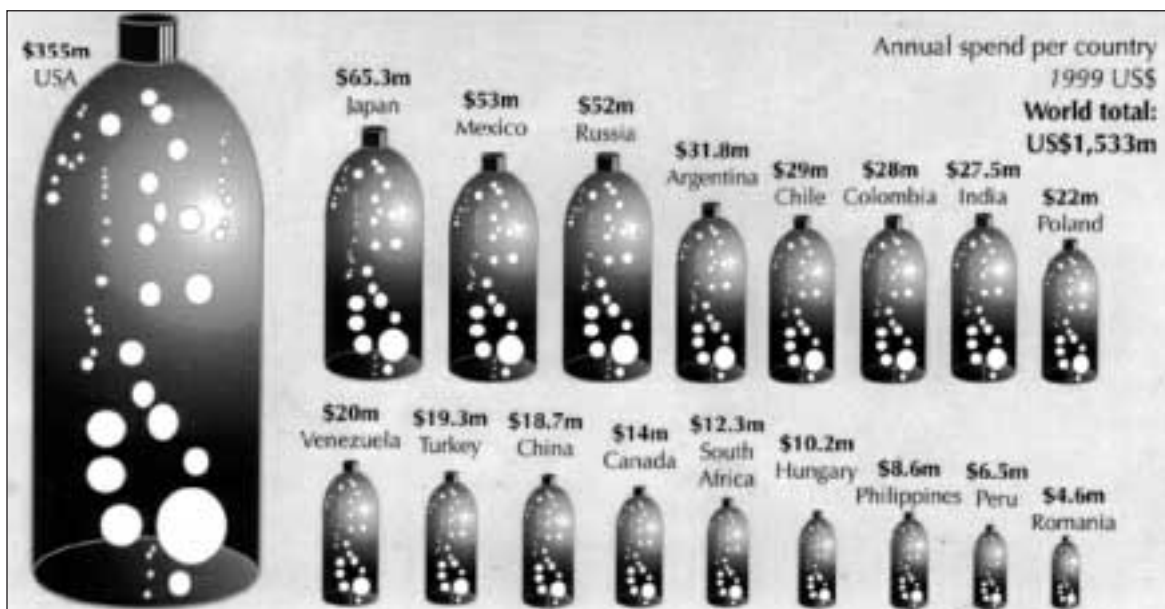
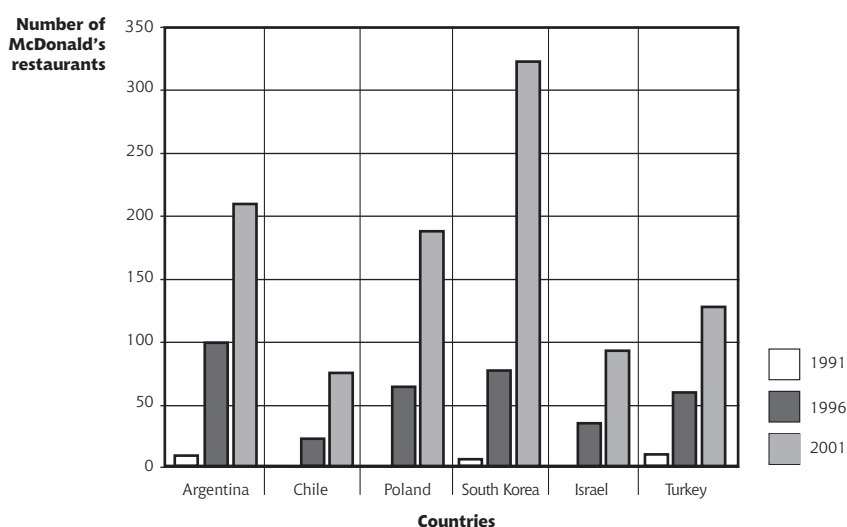


Figure 11: Coca-Cola is one of the most heavily advertised food brands, with an annual marketing spend of \$1.5 billion. Other top global advertising budgets in 2000 were Nestlé (\$1.9 billion), McDonald's (\$1.2 billion), Mars (\$1.1 billion), and Pepsi (\$0.7 billion), all specialising in energy-dense, low-nutrient food products.<sup>2</sup>

1. McDonald's corporate report (2001) *Performance at a glance*, www.mcdonalds.com

2. Lang, T & Millstone, E (eds) (2002) *The Atlas of Food*, Earthscan Books, www.earthscan.co.uk.



# Inverting the message: Dietary imbalance in food advertising

A 1996 survey of children's television in 13 industrialised countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK and USA) found that food advertising accounted for almost half of all advertising broadcast and represented by far the largest category of advertisements shown during children's TV viewing times. Few of these countries have restrictions on food advertising targeted at children (see page 25 for details).

The survey showed:

- Confectionery, pre-sweetened breakfast cereals and fast-food restaurants accounted for more than half of all food advertisements.
- Confectionery on its own accounted for one-fifth of all food advertising.
- Savoury snacks, high-sugar dairy products, ready-prepared foods, soft drinks, cakes, biscuits and desserts were also commonly advertised in most countries.
- Sponsorship of programmes by food companies was evident in six countries, usually promoting confectionery, soft drinks, sugar-sweetened breakfast cereals or savoury snacks.
- Advertisements for healthier foods such as fruit and vegetables were very rare, and non-existent in eight of the countries surveyed.

The survey identified the fast-food restaurant McDonald's as the 'most prolific advertiser' overall. Other widely advertised brand names were Nestlé, Mars and Cadbury's (all specialising in and promoting to children fatty and sugary confectionery and highly sugared cereals).

Survey data from: *A Spoonful of Sugar: Television food advertising aimed at children, an international comparative survey*. Consumers International Programme for Developed Economies, 1996

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'Advertising during children's programming continues to present a grossly imbalanced nutritional message, creating a conflict between the types of food promoted and national dietary recommendations.'

*TV Dinners*, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming (UK, 2001)

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'Britain's kids are now spending 61% more of their time each year in front of the TV than being taught by a teacher in school.'

[www.consumereducation.org.uk](http://www.consumereducation.org.uk) (November 2002)

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'It is inevitable that lower cost items, such as snack food, cereals and dolls, will comprise a large proportion of advertising at times when children are the main audience.'

UK Advertising Association (1997) *Position paper on The Interim Proposal for a Food Standards Agency* by Professor Philip James. [www.adassoc.org.uk](http://www.adassoc.org.uk)

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Figure 12: The 'Food Pyramid' guide shows recommended proportions of food groups for a healthy diet. The dark shaded area shows the fatty and sugary foods that should be 'eaten sparingly' (infrequently and in small amounts)

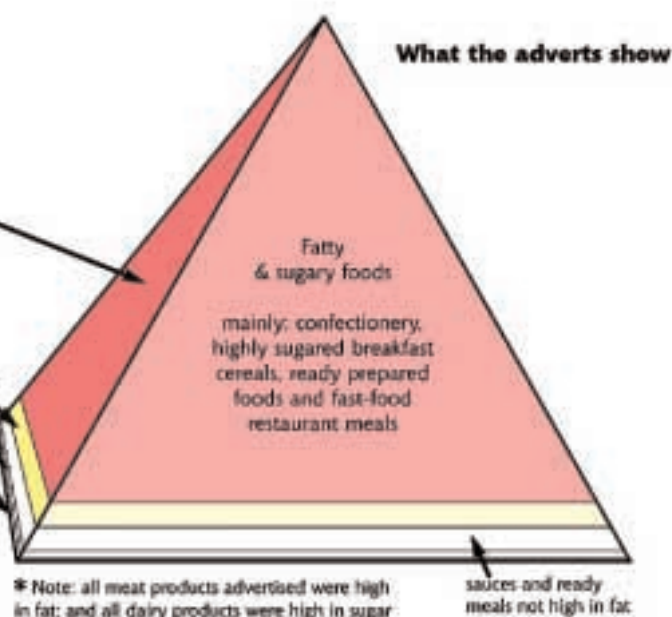


Figure 13: The pattern of children's TV advertising distorts the Food Pyramid into unhealthy proportions

## Section 2: What the food companies do

---

**M**ultinational and domestic food companies that promote energy-dense and low-nutrient foods and drinks use highly effective marketing techniques to encourage regular consumption, repeat purchases and brand loyalty – especially amongst children.

Familiar examples of such marketing include the use of collectable toys, games and contests, advertising and packaging featuring cartoon characters, food shaped and coloured to be especially appealing to children, and the use of TV advertising and catchy jingles.

However, as new technologies become accessible to children and teenagers, marketing budgets are now also directed towards techniques that fly under the radar of parental control. These use websites, email, text messaging and marketing in schools – appealing directly to a generation that is technologically savvy but nutritionally inexperienced and ill-equipped to distinguish inflated sales messages from objective fact.

The following pages illustrate the power and ubiquity of marketing, by companies that specialise in energy-dense, low-nutrient foods and drinks, and which explicitly target children and young people. Policies protecting children from such marketing pressures will need to address all aspects of marketing, such as TV advertising, mobile-phone text messages, free toy offers and promotional websites. The following pages contain:

- **An overview of brand-building**

- **Case studies of three leading fast-food chains** that, collectively, operate tens of thousands of restaurants in industrialised and less-industrialised countries:

Pages 10 & 11: *Case study of KFC* international marketing

Page 12: *Case study of McDonald's* international marketing

Page 13: *Case study of Burger King* international marketing

Note: These should be read in the context of the growing per capita supply of fats and sugar in countries around the world, bearing in mind the enormous advertising budgets supporting these products and the rate of growth of numbers of fast-food outlets.

- **Examples of marketing targeted at teenagers**, using sporting heroes and film stars to promote sugary drinks.

Page 14: *Pepsi and Coca-Cola* international marketing

- **Marketing to children through school & new technologies.**

Page 15 & 16: *School, the captive market*, evidence from the US, UK and Japan

Page 17: *Targeting children with new technologies*

# The power of the brand: More than just advertising

Foods are targeted at children and teenagers by use of the 'five Ps' – Place, Price & Packaging, Product Expansion, Promotions, and Public Relations.<sup>1</sup> Examples include:

**Place:** Making drinks available in vending machines in schools, cinemas, sporting events, shopping malls and bus stations.

**Price & Packaging:** Selling drinks in packages and at a price appealing to young people, often with sports or cartoon images.

**Product expansion:** Selling multiple flavours of a soft drink.

**Public Relations:** Sponsoring TV shows, sports and pop music events popular with children and teenagers; Donating money to children's causes and education such as reading schemes.

**Promotions:** Using 'child-friendly' promotional figures to attract children; featuring animation and celebrities in TV advertisements; running token-collecting schemes in exchange for goods (see below); offering collectable toys for young children, and competitions to win music equipment for teenagers; running websites with games and prizes popular with children.

1. Hawkes, C. (2002) *Marketing practices of fast-food and soft drinks multinationals: A review*, in *Globalization, diets and noncommunicable diseases*. Geneva: WHO

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'The growth [in chocolate sales] has been attributed to strong brands, constant innovation and an increase in impulse snacking by consumers. Advertising and promotion [are] crucial in maintaining these factors.'

International Cocoa Organization (2000), [www.icco.org](http://www.icco.org)

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'We define marketing as anything we do to create consumer demand for our brands.'

Coca-Cola Company *Annual Report* (1995)

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## Competition for stomach share: Sales promotions for fatty and sugary brands

Competition between brands is intense. To encourage brand loyalty, marketing campaigns encourage repeated consumption of fatty and sugary products such as chocolate and cola. In some schemes, high levels of consumption are rewarded with prizes or goods. In others, competitions offer large amounts of product as the prize. These examples are marketing campaigns operating in just one month in the UK (May 2003), for some of the country's leading confectionery and soft drinks brands.

**Kinder chocolate**, below: Competition advertised in kids' comics: *Win your weight in Kinder Maxi bars.*

**Mars (Masterfoods) chocolate**: 350,000,000 chocolate bars carry collectable codes to exchange for electronic goods such as personal stereos.

**Cadbury's chocolate**, right: 160,000,000 chocolate bars carry tokens, for children to collect in exchange for sports equipment.

**Nestlé chocolate**, below: Win a year's supply – a bar a day for a year.

**Pepsi soft drink**, right: Win a year's supply – promoted through national Saturday morning children's TV.



Examples of food marketing from The Food Commission UK

# Marketing techniques: How KFC encourages brand loyalty

One fast-food company that illustrates the vast range of marketing techniques employed to target children is KFC ('Kentucky Fried Chicken'). The following two pages show just some of the promotions worldwide, used to sell KFC meals rich in fats, sugar and salt.

## Internationally, KFC promotes its products to children by means of...



### ..free toys with children's fast-food meals

Free toys given with children's meals is the most widespread and effective fast-food marketing targeted at children, cited by UK parents ([www.parentsjury.org](http://www.parentsjury.org)) as the marketing technique most likely to encourage children to pester their parents for unhealthy food. Above, left: Free cartoon toys with children's meals in Korea (2003)<sup>1</sup>. Above, right: *Spiderman* and *X-Men 2* toys, coinciding with the release of new movies, offered with KFC children's meals in the UK (2002 and 2003).<sup>2</sup>



### ..local events

Fast-food restaurants create loyal customers by organising children's clubs and events. In Thailand (right, 2003)<sup>4</sup>, KFC coordinates a singing contest, to gain children's support and local media coverage.



### ..Chicky Clubs

In Singapore (right, 2003)<sup>5</sup>, KFC runs zoo visits & birthday parties. Individual children can be rewarded by their photos appearing on the national KFC website. In Panama (right)<sup>6</sup>, the Chicky Club is a central feature of a national campaign to encourage children to view KFC as a fun place to eat.



### ..packaging gimmicks

The standard menu of fried chicken & fried/whipped potato is revitalised with gimmicks of packaging such as this US *KFC Kids' Laptop* meal pack (2003)<sup>3</sup>. This offer was announced to the media with a press release, under the banner: 'Great food and loads of fun – in one!'



### ..low prices

Fast-food is especially appealing to children with limited pocket money, and increasing freedom

to buy their own snacks. Low-cost offers are a regular feature of marketing campaigns, such as this offer in Costa Rica (2003),<sup>1</sup> which boasts that KFC has served its fried chicken 'to three generations of Costa Ricans'.



1. [www.kfckorea.com](http://www.kfckorea.com)  
2. [www.kfc.co.uk](http://www.kfc.co.uk)

3. [www.kfc.com](http://www.kfc.com)  
4. [www.kfc.co.th](http://www.kfc.co.th)

5. [www.kfc.com.sg](http://www.kfc.com.sg)  
6. [www.kfc-panama.com](http://www.kfc-panama.com)

7. [www.kfccostarica.com](http://www.kfccostarica.com)

# Marketing techniques: How KFC encourages brand loyalty

The UK KFC website claims ‘...you should always try to choose the lower fat options such as pure chicken breast meat (as served at your nearest KFC!)...’<sup>1</sup> In fact, KFC takes chicken meat (typically 4% fat by weight) and sells it with four times as much fat (typically 15 to 20% fat). A Canadian study<sup>2</sup> of websites presenting nutrition information showed that 45% provided advice that conflicted with government dietary recommendations. Of these, 58% were on sites sponsored or run by commercial organisations.

## KFC promotes its products to children by means of...



### ..a ‘healthy’ spin

Energy-dense, low-nutrient foods are often marketed as if they are much more than a treat – described as making a *valuable* contribution to a child’s diet. The UK KFC website (left)<sup>3</sup> offers healthy eating advice that calls KFC chicken a ‘lower fat option’, ‘pure chicken breast meat’ implying it is healthier than ‘high fat sausages and burgers’. However a KFC Crispy Strips meal contains *twice as much* fat as an equivalent McDonald’s Chicken McNuggets



meal, and a KFC Zinger Tower Burger contains *over twice as much* fat as a McDonald’s Big Mac meal (UK, 2003). In the US, KFC nutrition information is presented with a little girl and a big red heart (left)<sup>4</sup>.

### ..making the product relevant to local children



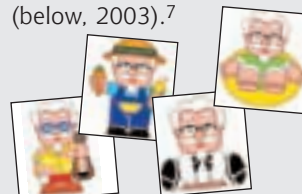
TV ads for KFC in Malaysia (left, 2003)<sup>5</sup> show a boy and a girl fishing in Malay countryside, bored and argumentative, becoming friends when they visit KFC together, with the sign-off: ‘sedapnya hingga menjilat jari’ (It’s finger lickin’ good).

In Malaysia, KFC also sponsors the popular children’s Cartoon TV Hour, explaining, ‘We intend to be part of Malaysia’s growing up years in entertainment.’

1. www.kfc.co.uk/family/healthyeating.html (2003)
2. Davison, K (1997) *The quality of dietary information on the World Wide Web. Clinical Performance & Quality Health Care* 5(2) 64-66]

### ..games and downloads

Some international KFC websites offer specially designed children’s areas, with simple point-and-click computer games, cartoons, and free graphics or animations available to download. These often repeat KFC branding, and may involve the cartoon Chicky chicken – the icon for the company’s marketing to children. On the Singapore KFC website (right)<sup>6</sup>, a children’s game measures how many drinks of coke, bags of fries and boxes of chicken pieces the child can grab in an allotted time. A further section shows a cartoon strip featuring the Chicky chicken and a cartoon family. On the Japan KFC website, KFC branded animations are available free to download (below, 2003).<sup>7</sup>



### ..moving into transitional economies



The appeal of adopting a ‘western European’ diet is evident from the KFC franchises springing up in transitional economies. Left, a promotion from Poland. Above, KFC coming soon to Romania... (both 2003).<sup>8</sup>

3. www.kfc.co.uk
4. www.kfc.com
5. www.kfc.com.my
6. www.kfc.com.sg
7. www.kfc.co.jp
8. www.kfc.pl

# Marketing techniques: How McDonald's harnesses pester power

On the previous pages, examples of KFC marketing illustrate how fast-food companies adapt marketing campaigns to ensure that their food products become a regular feature of children's lives around the globe.

In industrialised and transitional economies, targeting children and tapping into 'pester power' (the ability of children to influence their parents' purchasing choices) have become a normal part of the marketing landscape, aimed at engaging and maintaining loyalty through generations of children.

One in five Americans now eat in a fast-food restaurant daily. Although the rest of the world does not consume as much fast food as Americans, they are consuming more than in previous decades. The huge popularity of fast foods has been linked to rising rates of obesity in the US.<sup>1</sup>

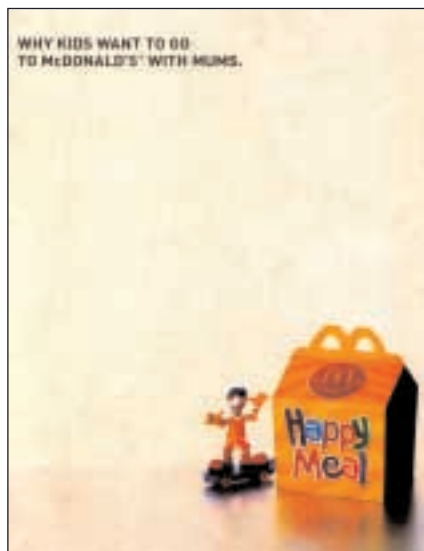
As the fast-food culture spreads, there are strong indications that other countries are following the American trend. Figure 10 on page 6 shows the rapid growth in availability of McDonald's fast food worldwide. And as new restaurants open, so children are targeted with sophisticated and well-financed marketing campaigns to persuade them to eat there.

'McDonald's advertising is in large part directed at children, with a view to them pressuring or pestering their parents to take them to McDonald's.'

Justice Bell, judgement on the McLibel trial (UK, 1997), supporting the defendants' accusation that McDonald's 'exploits children' [www.mcspotlight.org](http://www.mcspotlight.org)



From America (above, 1995)<sup>2</sup> to Lithuania (below, 2000)<sup>3</sup>, Barbie dolls help to promote McDonald's Happy Meals to young girls.



McDonald's acknowledges (above, in a press advert, *The Telegraph*, UK 2003) that marketing techniques, such as free toys given away with McDonald's meals, may be more influential on children's choices than the quality of the food. Below, children's football is sponsored by McDonald's in Scotland (2002).



## McDonald's techniques used to target children:

- Advertise during children's TV and cinema
- Sponsor children's TV
- Link up with popular children's films (Disney)
- Offer free movie tickets
- Link up with celebrities
- Offer collectable toys with children's meals
- Run birthday parties
- Include games and offers on websites
- Run email promotions
- Offer fast food as a 'reward' to children for achievement in school
- Pay literacy assistants to work with children in schools
- Sponsor sporting and pop music events
- Sponsor children's football clubs
- Make the food available as widely as possible
- Make the food cheap
- Adapt to local cultures



1. Hawkes, C. (2002) *Marketing practices of fast-food and soft drinks multinationals: A review*, in Globalization, diets and noncommunicable diseases. Geneva: WHO  
 2. From *The Face* magazine (1995)  
 3. From *Food Politics* by Marion Nestle (2002) University of California Press

# Marketing techniques: How Burger King encourages repeat purchases

Strategies by Burger King to promote regular consumption of its children's meals (burgers and french fries served with Coca-Cola) utilise many of the marketing techniques described on previous pages. However, offering free toys with children's meals is one of Burger King's most effective strategies. This page lists just some of Burger King's free-toy promotions in recent years.

In a leaflet (below), the BBC boasts 1 billion viewers worldwide for its Teletubbies characters, stating that the TV show for pre-school children has been broadcast in 106 countries and translated into 37 languages.<sup>1</sup> This impressive record has made Teletubbies popular with food manufacturers, who can pay BBC Worldwide for the right to include Teletubbies on their food packaging, giving them instant toddler-appeal. This technique is known as 'character licensing'. In 1999, a Teletubbies Burger King promotion featuring 50,000,000 Teletubbies dolls was credited by Burger King with doubling sales of Kids Club Meals in the US.<sup>2</sup> Other internationally popular characters such as the Simpsons (below), and



Above: The power of partnership branding. The BBC claims one billion viewers for its Teletubbies characters,<sup>1</sup> that have also taken part in hugely successful Burger King promotions. Below: Simpsons toys were a big hit for Burger King in a promotion in 2002.



characters from movies and TV shows (see right) are also used to promote Burger King meals, in marketing campaigns that maintain the popularity of fast-food meals through the generations.

A Burger King children's meal contains:  
 540 to 1,080 kcal  
 24 to 61g fat  
 8 to 26g saturated fat  
 2.3 to 3.4g salt  
 6 to 40g sugar  
 (The higher figures are for a meal of a Whopper Jr burger with cheese and mayo, small fries & a small milkshake.)

Source: Burger King website US: [www.burgerking.com/food/nutrition/nutritionaltable/downloads/menuitem.pdf](http://www.burgerking.com/food/nutrition/nutritionaltable/downloads/menuitem.pdf).

Table 1: Burger King promotions associated with children's meals routinely offer collectable sets of free toys linked to the latest children's films and TV shows. Recent promotions<sup>3</sup> include:

- Aladdin
- Anastasia
- Back to School
- Backstreet Boys
- Batman Beyond
- Beauty and the Beast
- Bitsy Ball
- Bug Riders
- Butt Ugly Martians
- Captain Planet
- Cartoon Network Racers
- Cat Dog
- Chicken Run
- Cubix Robots
- Dino Crawlers
- Dragonball Z
- Duloc's Meet and Treat
- Flintstones
- Gargoyles
- Glo Force
- Go Go Gadgets
- Goofy Movie
- Hunchback of Notre Dame
- Ice Age
- Jimmie Neutron Boy Genius
- Justice League
- Land Before Time
- Lickety Splits Roller Racers
- Lion King finger puppets
- Lord of the Rings
- M&M minis
- M&M toys
- Martians Have Landed
- Men in Black II
- Mickey's Toontown
- Mini Sports Games
- Mr Potato Head
- Nickel O Zone
- Nickelodeon
- Nintendo Superstars
- Oliver & Company
- Planet Control
- Pocahontas (finger puppets)
- Powerpuff Girls
- Road to El Dorado
- Rocket Power
- Rugrats in Paris
- Rugrats Treehouse
- Scaly Squirter
- Scooby Doo
- Shrek
- Silly Slammers 'n' Kids' Choice
- Simpsons talking watches
- Sky Dancers
- Spirit Stallion of Cimarron
- Spongebob Squarepants
- Superman
- Teletubbies
- Toy Story I
- Toy Story II
- Wild Thornberry's
- Wild Wild West
- Wolf Man
- X-Men Evolution

And... promotions offering at least 145 different Poke'mon games for mini Nintendo Game Boys.

1. BBC Worldwide promotional leaflet for Teletubbies character licensing, distributed at the Brand Licensing trade show, London (2001)

2. Burger King press release (1999). *Teletubbies ring up record sales for Burger King*

3. Sources: [www.fastfoodtoys.net](http://www.fastfoodtoys.net) and [www.fastfoodtoycollectibles.com](http://www.fastfoodtoycollectibles.com)

# Marketing techniques: How Pepsi and Coca-Cola target teenagers



Some of the most popular football stars in the world promote Pepsi  
[www.pepsi-football.co.uk](http://www.pepsi-football.co.uk)

'Sponsorship of sport in particular may cultivate positive attitudes by associating [a product] with characteristics which young people admire.'

UK Department of Health (1992) Effect of tobacco advertising on tobacco consumption

'Children watching athletes in TV commercials thought that the athletes paid to be in the advertisements to promote themselves rather than the products.'

Fox, R. (1995) *Manipulated kids: teens tell how ads influence them*, Educational Leadership, Vol 53, No 1

Soft drinks companies focus their attention (and advertising budgets) on the teenage market, through sponsorship of music events and link-ups with the most attractive and popular movie stars, pop singers and sports celebrities. The two examples on this page are just a tiny glimpse of the extensive marketing activities from these leading soft-drinks brands. Together, Pepsi and Coca-Cola spend \$2.2 billion on advertising in a single year.<sup>1</sup>

A 2001 study published in *The Lancet* showed that 'for each additional can or glass of sugar-sweetened drink that [children] consumed every day' their obesity risk jumped by 60%.<sup>2</sup>



In India, glamorous Bollywood megastars Aamir Khan (top left), Simran (above, right) and Aishwarya Rai (top, middle) promote Coca-Cola brands. Coca-Cola has also sponsored a musical talent contest to create an all-girl band Viva (left) who are so popular, its first album sold over 500,000 copies. [www.myenjoyzone.com](http://www.myenjoyzone.com)

1. Lang, T & Millstone, E (eds), (2002). *The Atlas of Food*, Earthscan Books, [www.earthscan.co.uk](http://www.earthscan.co.uk).

2. Ludwig, DS; Peterson KE; Gortmaker SL (2001) *Relation between consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and childhood obesity: A prospective observational analysis. The Lancet* 357: 505-508



# Captive markets: Food companies target children at school

Advertisers are increasingly using schools as a rich opportunity to target children with their marketing messages. The following pages give accounts from the US, Japan and the UK – the three countries which attract the largest share of international food marketing budgets (40%, 15.3% and 7.1% of the global total, respectively).<sup>1</sup>

In the US, marketing in schools is entrenched, well-financed, and highly sophisticated. Channel One, for instance, is a key vehicle for delivering advertisements directly to children as a captive audience, with schools paid (through incentives and equipment) to broadcast the commercial Channel One to children for a set time each day.

An audit of commercial activities in schools was recently conducted by the US government’s General Accounting Office (see below)<sup>2</sup>, which gives an insight into how children are systematically targeted through schools, in a country with very permissive regulation on marketing activities, and one of the highest obesity rates in the world.

The GAO identified other pervasive and persuasive examples of marketing to children in US schools including ‘pouring rights’ – exclusive contracts between drinks companies and school districts – to ensure that particular brands are the only drinks available to children.

Table 2: Commercial food promotions in US schools

Activities	Examples
<b>PRODUCT SALES</b>	
<i>Product sales</i>	Exclusive contracts to sell soft drinks on school grounds Contracts to sell food on school grounds
<i>Credit rebate</i>	Credit awarded for coupons collected by schools or children Internet sales from which a percentage is given to a school Fundraising through sales of candy (confectionery), cookies, etc.
<b>DIRECT ADVERTISING</b>	
<i>Advertising</i>	Billboards in school corridors Advertising on school buses Product displays in schools Corporate logos on school furniture and equipment Corporate logos on posters, book covers and assignment books
<i>Publications</i>	Ads in sports programmes, yearbooks, school newspapers
<i>Media</i>	Televised advertisements by Channel One or commercial stations Computer-delivered advertisements
<i>Samples</i>	Free snack food
<b>INDIRECT ADVERTISING</b>	
<i>Education</i>	Materials on issues associated with particular industries, for instance food companies Materials that promote industrial goals, such as nutritional information produced by dairy or meat associations
<i>Incentives</i>	McDonald’s poster contests, Pizza Hut’s Book-It program
<i>Corporate gifts</i>	Corporate gifts to schools, with commercial benefit to the donor
<b>MARKET RESEARCH</b>	
<i>Surveys or polls</i>	Student questionnaires or taste tests
<i>Internet panels</i>	Use of the internet to poll students’ responses
<i>Internet tracking</i>	Tracking students’ internet behaviour

‘Advertisers are appealing to ever younger audiences, those with the most years of buying power ahead of them. To accomplish these goals, the snack-food and soft-drink industries subsidise public education, through direct advertising, sponsored educational materials, contests and free samples, and commercials on school television.’

Editorial, *The Lancet* (2002) Vol 359, number 9322

‘Every school day, Channel One is seen by as many teens as the Super Bowl [8 million]. Channel One’s audience exceeds the combined number of teens watching anything on television during Primetime. Huge ratings. Unsurpassed reach. Unparalleled impact upon teen viewers.’

Channel One sales literature (1996)

‘Channel One is a marketer’s secret weapon. When used creatively by today’s innovative marketers, it is an unparalleled way to reach a massive teen audience in a highly relevant, important and uncluttered environment.’

Martin Grant, Channel One’s President of Sales and Marketing (1995)

1. Lang, T & Millstone, E (eds). (2002). *The Atlas of Food*. Earthscan Books, www.earthscan.co.uk

2. US General Accounting Office (September 2000) Report to Congressional Requesters. *Public Education: Commercial Activities in Schools*

# Captive markets: Food companies target children at school

## Marketing in schools: The UK

Unlike in the US, the UK government has not made an assessment of commercial activities nationally, so little data is available about how much schools use or rely on commercial materials to supplement state-funded catering, educational and sports equipment. However, several recent examples of national school-based promotions by food companies have been the subject of media attention and public-health concern. In May 2003, the UK's largest union of teachers voted to allow teachers to reject future commercial schemes in school, despite government support for such activities.<sup>1</sup>



**Sponsored exercise books:** many primary and secondary schools in the UK accept commercially sponsored exercise books, from the company Jazzy Media. The books are given free to children, paid for by advertisements from companies such as Pepsi (examples, right).

**Cadbury's Sports Equipment for Schools:** see p9.

**Walkers Crisps:** a long-running campaign encourages children to collect tokens from crisp packets, so that schools can exchange them for free books (Walkers Crisps is also owned by Pepsi). One school reported it had to collect 10,400 crisp packets to exchange for 63 books.<sup>2</sup>

**Product sampling:** UK schools are offered money to allow children to act as focus groups for food product sampling, 'with the implicit endorsement of school catering staff' (promotional leaflet, left).



## Schools are ad-free zones in Japan

In Japan, there are no commercial promotions in schools. In public schools, as the Japanese Offspring Fund consumer group reports, 'No ads or coupons or commercial materials are distributed to teachers or kids or parents. There are no vending machines and students are not allowed to eat anything other than school lunch (including drinks and chewing gum) when they are in school and they are also not allowed to buy and eat foods on their way between school and home.'

The School Lunch Law in Japan sets a nutritional standard for school lunches. Each school follows this law and provides a well-balanced, low-fat, low-salt lunch of rice or bread, soup, 2-3 side dishes, milk and dessert. Calories from fat are set to be no more than 25-30% of the total calories of the meal. The menu is given out to children and parents every month, also providing details of the calories and nutritional breakdown.

It is important to note that, as the Japan Offspring Fund reports: since Japanese schools are not a conducive place for advertising, marketing efforts in Japan are focused on TV commercials and mag-

1. Advertising Information Group notices (April 25, 2003), [www.aig.org](http://www.aig.org)

2. St. Andrew's School, Preston, UK (November 2001) *Report on school fundraising activities*. [www.standrews.dorset.sch.uk](http://www.standrews.dorset.sch.uk)

# Targeting children: New technologies

Even where advertising is regulated (either on a voluntary or statutory basis), regulators have rarely kept pace with the rapidly changing advertising technologies, which are of special interest to food companies wishing to target teenagers. This is a market that is increasingly media savvy and has independent spending power.

New technologies, including the internet, internet access via mobile phones, interactive TV, text messaging and email, allow advertisers direct, usually unmonitored (parent-free), access to children. Even in the countries where advertising to children is restricted, such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway, there are no specific rules governing marketing via mobile phones.

Access to the internet is now widespread and ever more accessible, via schools, public libraries, internet cafés and at home. Many food companies are finding this an attractive (and cost-effective) way of reaching young people with their marketing messages.

Websites for the youth market typically feature branded games, competitions, promotions, characters, sports sponsorship, and 'kids only' zones that enable children to interact directly with the company, for instance voting on new flavours or pack designs. As an industry report notes: *'This approach typifies a growing trend of below-the-line promotional activity to encourage even more attempts to capitalise on the contemporary child's interactive product expectations'*.<sup>1</sup>

Interactive websites provide the opportunity to gather personal data on young people. In 2000, the ZapMe! corporation supplied 2,000 US schools with computers and Internet access. In return, it *'reserved the contractual right to track students' surfing habits individually'*<sup>2</sup> and data such as the students' age, gender and zip code, to supply to advertisers. Through protests and media attention, a parent and NGO coalition succeeded in preventing ZapMe! from operating in schools.<sup>3</sup>

The use of mobile phones is also greatly on the increase, bringing opportunities for promotional text messages. A high proportion of young people own a mobile phone, including 63% of young Kenyans;<sup>4</sup> 90% of young people in the UK;<sup>5</sup> 88% in Finland;<sup>6</sup> 90% in Norway;<sup>7</sup> and 16.5 million young Americans.<sup>8</sup>

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'There is nothing else that exists like [the internet] for advertisers to build relationships with kids.'

Saatchi & Saatchi, marketing agency, 2002

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In 1997, a study of popular children's websites found that:

- 90% collected children's personal details;
- 40% used free gifts and competitions to get children's personal details;
- 25% sent children an email after their visit to the site;
- 40% sent 'cookies' to track the child's use of the site.

Center for Media Education, *Online Advertising Targeting Children*, 1997

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Table 3: Young people using the Internet daily<sup>9</sup>

USA	85%	Germany	51%
Australia	82%	Spain	45%
South Korea	78%	France	41%
UK	72%	Japan	39%
Italy	55%	Argentina	27%

1. Datamonitor (2002) *Market intelligence report*.
2. Schwartz, J. (November 2, 2002) *Free Computers for Schools: An Offer Too Good to Last*, in the *New York Times*
3. Commercial Alert (2000), [www.commercialalert.org](http://www.commercialalert.org)
4. Githagui, M. (June 3-9, 2003) *What Kenyan kids really (don't) want*, *East African Financial Standard*, citing a Consumer Insight survey
5. *PC Magazine* (April 1, 2003) *Cost-conscious Brits threaten success of 3G*
6. Finnish Newspapers Association (2003) [www.sanomalehdet.fi](http://www.sanomalehdet.fi)
7. Norwegian media barometer (2000) *Half of Norway uses the Internet every week*, [www.ssb.no/medie\\_en/arkiv/art-2001-03-26-01-en.html](http://www.ssb.no/medie_en/arkiv/art-2001-03-26-01-en.html)
8. UPOC (February 2002) *Snapshot of the US Wireless Market*.

# Nutrition messages: How companies skew the science

Knowledge about food and nutrition comes from a variety of sources, including from families, schools, advertising, labelling and the media. The information from these sources is influenced by behind-the-scenes activities of media-management companies acting on behalf of the food industry, and by information-dissemination groups funded by the industry. Such activities are designed to ensure that food products and food groups are shown in the best possible light, and may disparage evidence of links between diet and ill health.

The International Life Science Institute ([www.ils.org](http://www.ils.org)) was co-founded in 1978 by food companies Heinz, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, General Foods, Kraft and Procter & Gamble (and until 1991 directed by the vice-president of Coca-Cola).<sup>1</sup> An ILSI publication on the health effects of sugar consumption states: *'intake of sugars is inversely associated with the prevalence of obesity'* and comments on the need to research the positive role of glucose in *'facilitating mental processes'*, whilst downplaying the impact of frequent sugar consumption on dental health, and advocating tooth-brushing as the only realistic way to address dental disease.<sup>2</sup> ILSI's members include British Sugar plc, Ensuiko Sugar Refining Co., Tate & Lyle Speciality Sweeteners and the confectioners M&M/Mars Incorporated.

Mars uses its website to display fatty, sugary Mars bars amidst pictures of blueberries, strawberries, grapes and apples (below) to promote its message *'certain chocolates and cocoa may provide cardiovascular health benefits'* from antioxidants. The website [www.cocoapro.com](http://www.cocoapro.com) is publicised to customers on millions of Mars confectionery wrappers.

A common theme promoted by the food industry is that increased physical activity is the most important factor in addressing the obesity epidemic, downplaying the role of diet. McDonald's and Coca-Cola have both supported the *Step With It* programme to encourage children to measure their walking with a pedometer. In 2003, Cadbury's offered schoolchildren free sports gear (see page 9) if they collected wrappers from chocolate bars. This was described by Cadbury's as a way to help children maintain a healthy bodyweight, but the total scheme required the purchase of 160,000,000 chocolate bars (36 billion kilocalories and nearly 2 million kg of fat).<sup>3</sup> The membership of the American Council for Fitness and Nutrition includes McDonald's, Hershey, Coca-Cola, the Sugar Association and the American Advertising Federation.

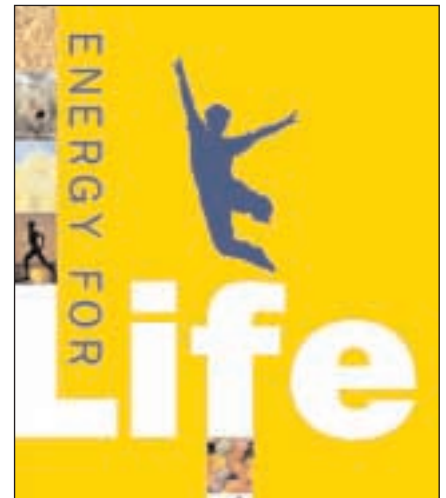
Also in the US, the 'Freedom of Information for Children' group lobbies on behalf of the advertising industry for freedom to advertise to children.



1. Boseley, S. (January 9, 2003) WHO 'infiltrated by food industry', in *The Guardian*

2. Gurr, M. (1995) *Nutritional and health aspects of sugars*, [www.ils.org](http://www.ils.org)

3. Food Commission (April/June 2003) *Cadbury's wants children to eat two million kg of fat – to get fit*. Food Magazine 61



A British Sugar information leaflet (above) extols the health benefits of sugar consumption

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'To improve our diets, we should be eating less fat and much more carbohydrate. Sugar, along with starchy foods like bread, rice, pasta and potatoes, is an excellent source of carbohydrate.' 'Experts continue to agree that for health and enjoyment, we should aim to eat more carbohydrate foods of all kinds, including sugars and starches.'

British Sugar plc, 2003, *Energy for Life* education book. [www.britishsugar.co.uk](http://www.britishsugar.co.uk)

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'All soft drinks are healthy because they provide the vital fluids our bodies need with some also providing contributions to the various vitamins and minerals we need every day.'

British Soft Drinks Association, trade body that lobbies government and provides 'scientific evidence', as above, on its website [www.britissoftdrinks.com](http://www.britissoftdrinks.com)

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'We are not going to solve this debate by counting calories – it's about getting kids active... Childhood obesity is a major problem and we're doing something practical about it.'

Cadbury's statement on its *Get Active* campaign (2003) <http://getactive.cadbury.co.uk>

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## Section 3: Consumer concerns about food marketing

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In an international survey conducted for this report<sup>1</sup>, views were sought from consumer organisations around the world, relating to their views on food marketing practices. Responses showed many areas of common and growing concern, which helped to inform the writing of this report. A sample of responses is shown below:

- In India, a consumer group reported that food advertisements feature in early evening children's viewing times, and expressed concern about food sponsorship of sport events and education materials in schools, especially for fast food, confectionery and soft drinks.
- In Japan, a consumer group reported that children were also targeted through TV and sporting events, and identified advertising as one of the top negative influences on children's diets.
- In Argentina, a consumer group identified food advertising on TV and unhealthy foods available at school as key negative influences.
- In Bangladesh, a consumer group reported use of free toys and cartoon characters to sell food to children.
- In Belarus, a consumer group felt strongly that the full range of marketing techniques, from TV advertising to free toys and sports sponsorship, persuade Belarusian children to eat unhealthily.
- In South America, consumer organisations in Guatemala and Costa Rica said that advertising, free toys, cartoon characters and poor food and nutrition education in schools all contribute to unhealthy diets.

We also asked consumer groups whether they knew of systematic interventions that had successfully supported healthier diets. The most commonly reported successful intervention was the regulation of breastmilk substitute (formula milk) marketing, supported by the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Interventions, common in industrialised and less-industrialised countries, had been led by international bodies (WHO and UNICEF), supported by national governments, and promoted by campaigns run by governmental and non-governmental public-health organisations.

Other positive interventions (usually reported as having more limited success) include promotion of 'five a day' – the advice to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Two examples of successful five-a-day school-based interventions, based on well-researched principles of public-health promotion, are shown on page 26.

It was extremely rare for consumer organisations to report any successful interventions to tackle the marketing of energy-dense, low-nutrient foods. Cases that were mentioned tended to be limited to local projects working with small numbers of children or individual communities. Taxation of snack foods and soft drinks was reported for over 30 US states, but has now been withdrawn in a third of these.<sup>2</sup>

A few organisations mentioned 'media literacy' programmes designed to help children become 'media savvy' (see page 28). However, some of these programmes were food industry funded and of questionable benefit. No systematic evaluation was reported of the efficacy of such projects in promoting healthy lifestyles or balanced diets. Indeed, some did not deal with food or nutrition issues as areas of special concern.

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'Global fast food and soft drinks companies clearly view children and teenagers as market makers... They implement a wide range of activities to target children and teenagers. Soft drinks brands focus mainly on teenagers, fast food companies on young children.'

Hawkes, C. (2002) *Marketing practices of fast-food and soft drinks multinationals: A review*, in Globalization, diets and noncommunicable diseases. Geneva: WHO

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'Despite the great need, there are too few programs designed to promote healthier diets and physical activity. Even the largest nutrition education programs receive negligible support. For instance, the National Cancer Institute spends only about \$1 million annually on the media component of its 5-a-day campaign to encourage greater consumption of fruits and vegetables.'

National Cancer Institute (1999) cited in Jacobson, MF & Brownell KD (2000) *Small taxes on soft drinks and snack foods to promote health*. American Journal of Public Health, vol 90, no.6

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1. Responses cited are from:  
*Bangladesh*: NGO capacity building and advocacy World Learning for International Development  
*Argentina*: International Baby Food Action  
*Belarus*: Belorusskoe Obstestvo Zastity Potrebitelei  
*Costa Rica*: International Baby Food Action  
*Guatemala*: International Baby Food Action  
*Japan*: Japanese Offspring Fund  
*India*: Consumer Guidance Society of India

2. Jacobson, M, Center for Science in the Public Interest (2003) *Small taxes on soft drinks and snack foods to promote health*, in the American Journal of Public Health, vol 90, no.6

# Concerns about food marketing in Europe

There is growing concern among public-health and consumer organisations around Europe about the marketing of fatty, sugary and salty foods to children. As Jim Murray, Director of the Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs (BEUC) has said: *'Faced with the proliferation of commercial communications, more than half of BEUC member organisations would tend to favour a ban on TV advertising to children in their own country. BEUC also calls for a horizontal piece of legislation to protect children in relation to all forms of marketing practices.'*<sup>1</sup>

Such concerns are voiced in a climate in which the marketing of foods to children is growing more aggressive, and many governments favour deregulating markets rather than increasing child protection. Meanwhile, organisations representing consumers, teachers, dental health professionals, medical charities, public-health groups and children are joining the growing movement calling for restrictions or a ban on the marketing of unhealthy foods to children.

## Consumer Committee of the European Commission

This Committee, with representatives from consumer groups around Europe, is concerned about the *'proliferation of commercial communications'* as something that *'tries to influence the values and views of children and could even encourage an unhealthy way of life'*. A report from a working group in 2002 suggested that there are no rules in EU legislation to protect children from commercial exploitation, and that current codes of conduct are unsatisfactory as *'there is no enforcement'*. It called for statutory legislation, complemented by self-regulatory codes carrying enforcement instruments.

Consumer Committee of the European Commission, working group on *Commercial practices aimed at children* (2002)

## The European Children's Network

*'Too often commercial considerations come before the best interests of the child with the potential to infringe children's rights... In 1995 a UK TV station transmitted advertisements to children in Sweden, although these are prohibited for children under 12 in Sweden.'*

Submission from ECN to the drafting group for an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000)

## International Obesity Task Force

*'The EU's implementation of a tobacco advertising ban should now be followed by similar EU based restrictions on the targeting of the young, including pre-school children, to consume inappropriate foods and drinks.'*

International Obesity Task Force *Obesity in Europe report* (2002)

## What do parents think?

Many surveys have shown that British parents are deeply concerned about the impact of advertisements on their children. Several independent surveys (including surveys conducted by organisations working for the marketing industry) confirm high levels of parental concern:

- Mori (1994) found 64% of parents would like tougher restrictions on the advertising of foods and drinks to children, and that most parents believed advertising has a detrimental effect on children's diets.

- Cooperative Wholesale Society (2000): 80% of parents wanted tighter controls on advertising to children, and 77% wanted to see a ban on the advertising of food to children.
- Welsh Consumer Council (2003): *'Many parents felt under pressure from their children's demands as a result of the attractive and powerful advertising they saw on TV during children's programmes.'*
- Chartered Institute of Marketing (2002): 75% of parents said that children see too much advertising.

## UK campaign for a ban on junk-food advertising

A coalition campaign in the UK is calling for a statutory ban on the advertising of fatty, salty and sugary foods during children's TV. The campaign, coordinated by Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, demonstrates the enormous cross-sectoral support on this issue. Over 80 national public-health organisations have signed up to the campaign, including:

- Allergy Alliance
- Autism Unravelled
- Baby Milk Action
- Blood Pressure Association
- British Allergy Foundation
- British Association for Community Child Health
- British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry
- British Cardiac Society
- British Dental Association
- British Dietetic Association
- British Heart Foundation
- British Hypertension Society
- British Institute for Allergy & Environmental Therapy
- British Society for Cardiovascular Research
- Centre for Food Policy
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
- Child Growth Foundation
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Children's Society
- Community Health UK
- Community Nutrition Group
- Community Practitioners' & Health Visitors' Association
- Consensus Action on Salt and Health
- Coronary Artery Disease Research Assoc.
- Coronary Prevention Group
- Diabetes UK
- Digestive Disorders Foundation
- Faculty of Public Health Medicine
- Family Welfare Association
- Food Commission
- General Consumer Council for N. Ireland
- Health Education Trust
- Hyperactive Children's Support Group
- Maternity Alliance
- McCarrison Society for Nutrition & Health
- Migraine Action Association
- National Children's Bureau
- National Council of Women
- National Consumer Federation
- National Heart Forum
- National Obesity Forum
- National Oral Health Promotion Group
- N. Ireland Chest, Heart & Stroke Association
- Positive Parenting
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Royal College of Physicians
- Royal College of Surgeons
- Royal Institute of Public Health
- Royal Society for the Promotion of Health
- Scottish Heart & Arterial Disease Risk Prevention
- Stroke Association
- The Obesity Awareness & Solutions Trust
- UK Public Health Association
- UNISON (public-sector union)
- Weight Concern
- World Cancer Research Fund

Source: [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

1. Murray, J (October 2002) Speech by the director of BEUC (European Consumers Organisation) at the conference *Marketing to Children on the Net, iTV and Mobile*

# Professional concerns about food marketing in North America

As well as consumer and parent groups, a wide range of professional organisations also express concerns about food advertising to children.

- The **American Psychological Association** has expressed concern about its members using their psychological expertise to assist the advertising industry in targeting children. It has called for regulation of TV food ads aimed at children, with mandatory equal time for pro-nutrition messages, and a ban on fast foods and soft drinks in schools, suggesting that schools seek out contracts with sports-related companies instead. ([www.apap.org](http://www.apap.org))
- The **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry** told the US Federal Trade Commission that advertising is problematic because preadolescent children look up to fictional characters (frequently used in marketing) and tend to do what they ask of them. (*US News & World Report*, Vol. 122 June 1997)
- The **American Academy of Paediatrics** states that it '*believes advertising directed toward children is inherently deceptive and exploits children under age 8 years of age*'. It calculates that American children have viewed an estimated 360,000 advertisements on television before graduating from high school, and that, '*Advertising food products to children promotes profit rather than health.*' ([www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org), *Children, Adolescents, and Advertising* – policy paper RE9504, 1995)
- The **American Public Health Association** has expressed concern that despite public health campaigns promoting healthier diets, consumption patterns have not changed significantly, due '*at least in part to counterproductive government policies and industry marketing practices that promote foods of lower health value, target vulnerable groups such as children and less educated adults, or otherwise distort disease prevention messages.*' (APHA policy report 9213PP, 1992, [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org))
- The **American Dental Association** says that '*Specific brand endorsements and marketing strategies, often found in exclusive soft drink contracts [in schools], may influence children's sugary beverage consumption patterns and increase the risk for decay.*' (ADA press release, February 2002, [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org))
- In 2002, the **Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health** and the **Community Nutritionists Council of British Columbia** joined the **Centre for Science in the Public Interest Canada** and national health and citizen groups in calling on the Canadian government (as one of 8 policy recommendations) to '*prohibit advertising junk food to children*'. (CSPI Canada press release, November 2002, [www.cspinet.org/canada](http://www.cspinet.org/canada))
- The **Canadian Paediatrics Society** has stated that '*Television viewing makes a substantial contribution to obesity because prime time commercials promote unhealthy dietary practices*', and '*The fat content of advertised products exceeds the current average Canadian diet and nutritional recommendations.*' (Psychosocial Paediatrics Committee, policy paper PP2003-1, 2003. [www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca))

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[In the US] the average high-school graduate will have spent approximately 15,000 to 18,000 hours in front of a television set but only about 12,000 hours in school.

Andersen R E, et al. (1998) *Relationship of physical activity and television watching with body weight and level of fatness among children*. JAMA 1998; 279:938-942,959-960.

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'The contribution of TV viewing to childhood obesity is twofold: energy expenditure is decreased through the sedentary nature of the pastime and energy consumption is increased by either eating during viewing or responding to advertisements for high-carbohydrate, high-fat foods aimed at children.'

West Virginia Department of Health & Human Resources (2002) *The burden of obesity* [www.wvdhhr.org/bph/oehp/obesity](http://www.wvdhhr.org/bph/oehp/obesity)

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'Television advertising of food directed at young children may help to explain why reduced television viewing reduces rates of weight gain. Reducing the amount of time that children are allowed to watch television is one strategy that offers children opportunities for activity, and it is likely to alter requests for advertised foods as well.'

Dietz, W. (2001) Director of Nutrition and Physical Activity for the US Centers for Disease Control, in an editorial for the BMJ, 322: 313-314

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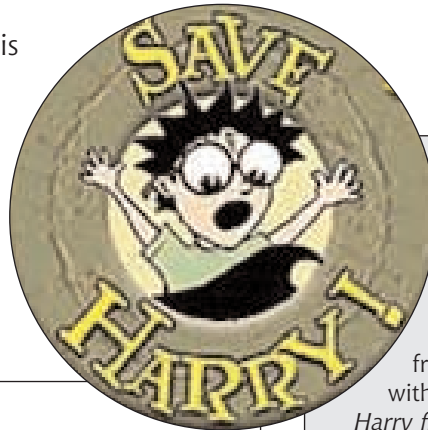
In 1978, the US Federal Trade Commission proposed a ban or severe restrictions on all television advertising to children arguing that all advertising to young children is inherently unfair and deceptive. Under pressure from the industry, Congress instead passed the *FTC Improvements Act* (1980) that removed the FTC's authority to restrict television advertising.

Kunkel D; Gantz, W (1993) *Assessing compliance with industry self-regulation of television advertising to children*. Applied Communication Research 148:151

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# Fighting back: Grassroots action against junk food marketing

Around the world there is growing consumer pressure for food marketing to be controlled, and for food products marketed at children to be improved. This page shows just some of the campaigns on this theme that have sprung up in recent years, demonstrating the groundswell of popular support that could be harnessed by coordinated action to improve children's diets and health.



To date, over 28,000 people have sent letters to JK Rowling, author of the internationally best-selling children's book series *Harry Potter* asking her to withdraw from an advertising deal with Coca-Cola, and 'Save Harry from the clutches of Coca-Cola'. The campaign *Save Harry!* is coordinated by the US Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Campaign website: [www.saveharry.com](http://www.saveharry.com)



Commercial Alert's  
**PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS**

Campaigning in the US, the NGO Commercial Alert was instrumental in stopping the ZapMe! corporation tracking children's internet use at school (see page 17). It also supports a Parents' Bill of Rights, to enact laws to protect children, including a *Children's Food Labeling Act* requiring fast food restaurant chains to provide nutrition information, and a *Commercial-Free Schools Act* to prohibit companies 'using the schools and... school laws to bypass parents'. [www.commercialalert.org](http://www.commercialalert.org)



The Australian coalition, Advocacy Network on Food Advertising to Children, lobbies politicians, teaches children to be sceptical about marketing, and has called for restrictions on food advertising to children. It circulates a newsletter to teachers and health workers advising how to help children deal with marketing pressures, and to support healthy eating. [www.chdf.org.au/foodadstokids/](http://www.chdf.org.au/foodadstokids/)

Fight the Obesity Epidemic was set up in New Zealand dedicated to preventing the development of obesity in children. A key action has been to reduce access to inappropriate foods through school canteens. The group notes, however, that *'By themselves, these changes will be ineffective while children continue to be manipulated by the powerful forces of television advertising... represent[ing] the food that we would least like our children to consume, being high in fat, salt and sugar.'*

Work with schools to exclude fatty and sugary foods from the canteen is coordinated by the NGO Diabetes New Zealand [www.diabetes.org.nz](http://www.diabetes.org.nz)



In the UK, a Parents Jury of nearly 1,500 parents, established by the Food Commission in 2002, judges children's foods and marketing aimed at children and gives awards to companies and products. Prizes have included the 'Tooth Rot'

award, the 'Pester Power' award and the 'Breakfast Battles' award, for products and marketing practices that undermine children's healthy eating. Good practice is praised through prizes such as the 'Food Hero' award, the 'Honest Food' and 'Friendly Food Facts' awards. The jury is also targeting the BBC, asking it to consider promoting healthy foods using characters popular with toddlers, such as the Tweenies and the Teletubbies.

[www.parentsjury.org.uk](http://www.parentsjury.org.uk) – a second Parents Jury was set up in New Zealand in 2003, [www.greens.org.nz/campaigns/safe-food](http://www.greens.org.nz/campaigns/safe-food)

Whilst advertising and sales of fatty and sugary foods and drinks is still widespread in US schools (see page 15), several school districts have made international headlines by ousting these products from school vending machines or canteens.

- In New York City, school menus will soon provide low-fat and low-salt foods. Sugary drinks in vending machines will be replaced by fruit juice and water. *BBC News*, June 2003
- San Francisco plans to ban junk food and soda in schools starting with the 2003-2004 academic year. Sacramento and Buffalo City are considering similar moves. *Public Health Advocacy Institute, Legal approaches to the obesity epidemic*, June 2003
- Los Angeles school district, one of the largest in America with more than 700,000 students, has banned junk food and soda sales in its schools. *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 2003
- In Seattle, a parents' group called *Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools* lobbied successfully to ban advertising in the district's schools. It is now aiming for state-wide legislation in Washington state. *International Herald Tribune*, Feb 2003



## Section 4: Can the industry reform?

The leading investment bank UBS Warburg<sup>1</sup> has recently issued warnings to clients interested in investing in international food companies that, *'Initiatives to curb the sale of 'unhealthy' food-stuffs are likely to be introduced at some stage. If they do not have an impact on consumption then stronger measures may be considered.'* UBS Warburg gave an obesity ranking of high-risk shares, based on the estimated company dependence on 'less good' foods. The ranking is shown in the table (right). In 2003, a similar report by investment advisor JP Morgan<sup>2</sup> confirmed that companies seen to be contributing to ill health are putting their share prices at risk.

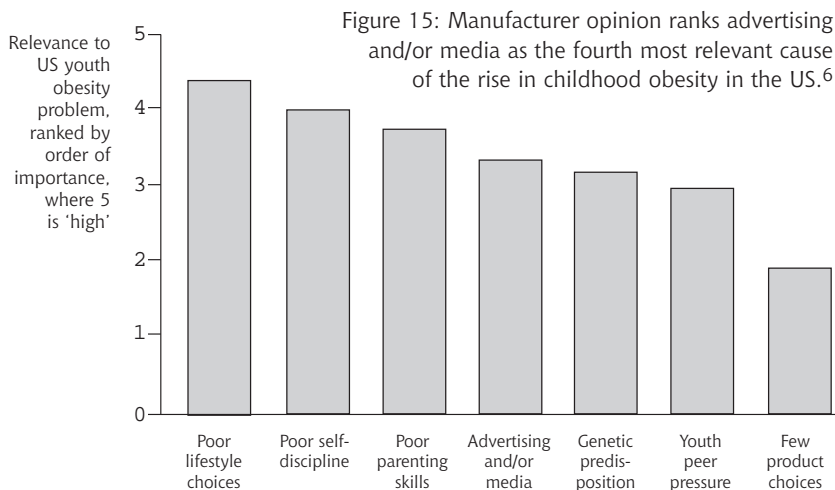
Such concerns have already had an effect on the share price of major food companies. In December 2002, Burger King was sold off by Diageo to a group of private investors for \$1.5 billion, about a third less than agreed six months earlier.<sup>3</sup> The fall in share price was partly attributed by investment analysts to the fact that, during the negotiations, McDonald's was under threat of a lawsuit from US teenagers blaming their obesity on fast food companies.

Learning from the regulatory history of tobacco control, some companies are now diversifying their portfolio of food products to be more 'healthy'. Danone, for instance, received credit from UBS Warburg for its low-fat dairy products and low-calorie drinks.

In June 2003, Kraft Foods announced that *'in response to rising obesity rates'* it would limit portion sizes of single-serve packages, improve nutrition labelling, stop all marketing in schools, and develop guidelines for products in school vending machines.<sup>4</sup>

Some companies have opted for public-relations activities to improve their brand. Many sponsor physical activity initiatives and health conferences, or set up nutrition advice services, and use these avenues to promote the message that ill health is caused more by lack of physical activity than unhealthy diets (see page 18).

Some companies that continue to specialise in energy-dense, low-nutrient foods are becoming increasingly combative, defending the nutritional value of their foods and attacking any advice for people to consume less of their product. The WHO has itself been a target of the sugar industry for publishing advice that people should restrict sugar to 10% of total calories.<sup>5</sup>



**Table 4: UBS Warburg warns: 'Don't buy'**

Obesity rank	Company	Income from 'less good' foods
1	Hershey Foods	99%
2	McDonald's	99%
3	Tate & Lyle	99%
4	Cadbury's	90%
5	Pepsi Bottling Group	79%
6	PepsiCo Inc	77%
7	Coca-Cola Enterprises	75%
8	Coca-Cola	72%
9	Heinz	50%
10	Nestlé	46%
11	Conagra	39%
12	Kraft Foods	35%
13	Unilever plc	27%
14	Danone	20%

### Control on alcohol marketing

In the 1990s, manufacturers recognised that marketing to children can prompt harmful behaviour. In the UK, this concern was triggered in the 1990s by the introduction of alcopops. These are intensely sweet, fruit-flavour alcoholic drinks in attractive bottles, designed to be especially appealing to young people.

After widespread media and regulatory attention, a code of marketing practice was set up by the alcohol industry and over 60 nationally-marketed alcopop products judged to be targeted explicitly at children were removed from sale for breaking the code.

However, the industry code is voluntary and new alcopop products continue to enter the market.

[www.portmangroup.org.uk](http://www.portmangroup.org.uk)

1. UBS Warburg (November 2002) *Absolute risk of obesity: Food and drink companies not so defensive?* London: Global Equity Research
2. JP Morgan (April 2003) *Food manufacturing. Obesity: The big issue.* Geneva: European Equity Research
3. Carlisle, J (December 13, 2002) *Diageo Sells Burger King.* Market News on [www.fool.co.uk](http://www.fool.co.uk)
4. Kraft press release (June 2003), [www.kraft.com](http://www.kraft.com) and [www.kraft.com/obesity/](http://www.kraft.com/obesity/)
5. Boseley, S. (April 2003) *Sugar industry threatens to scupper WHO, in The Guardian*
6. Datamonitor (2002) *Childhood Obesity 2002: How obesity is shaping the US food and beverage markets*

# Setting limits: Self regulation – can it work?

## Complaints? We've made a few...

Until recently, food and drink advertisements did not attract many complaints. However, complaints have started to rise, especially for advertising that makes claims for the 'healthiness' of products. In the UK, for example, the Advertising Standards Authority (which governs a voluntary code of practice for the advertising industry) receives more complaints against advertising for food products than for any other industry, with a record 175% rise in 2002 over 2001.

Regulations differ between countries on the controls of advertising, with voluntary codes of practice being common. However, this report contends that such codes are inadequate to protect children's health.

Self-regulation is the process whereby commercial food marketers participate in and are responsible for their own regulation. A prime example is the International Code of Advertising Practice, issued by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). Such codes usually have no basis in law, although adherence to a code may be cited by a corporation when defending itself against a complainant.

## The problems

- **Television-centric** – Codes on advertising to children tend to focus on television, and therefore do not reflect the nature of the modern advertising environment. Newer technologies of advertising – such as internet marketing – are rarely considered.
- **Lack of sanctions** – When marketing companies self-regulate, they act as both prosecution and defence, judge and jury, and the likelihood that they will administer strong sanctions against their own fee-paying voluntary members is low. *'Self-regulatory systems typically require the compliance of the industry. Where such compliance is not forthcoming sanctions are typically limited or ineffective.'* (TransAtlantic Consumer Dialogue analysis of self-regulation, 2003)
- **Retrospective control** – Unless there is a pre-vetting scheme in operation, which few countries appear to operate, any complaints are dealt with after the advertisement has been broadcast. Indeed many complaints may not be adjudicated until the entire marketing campaign has finished, weakening the effect of sanctions.
- **Compound effects of advertising** – Codes refer to individual advertisements, not to the compound effects. They do not consider the effect of repetition of advertisements nor the cumulative effects of advertisements having similar messages or promoting similar types of food.
- **Leaky borders** – Both self-regulatory codes and statutory regulation have problems of 'border control' when advertising originates from sources outside national jurisdiction. This has already happened in Sweden, where external sources such as cable and satellite television have undermined national controls that ban advertising to children.

Voluntary codes of advertising practice are based on the ICC International Code of Advertising Practice. It is worth noting that the ICC Code does not: prohibit the advertising of any specific product type; prohibit or control advertising aimed at any particular age group; control the frequency/volume of advertising, or the time of advertisements in children's programming.

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'Complaints against food and drink companies in the UK increased from 445 in 2001 to 1,222 last year, a rise of 175%. Many of the complaints... involved false or misleading claims about benefits of consuming food and drinks.'

(Note: the food companies attracting the most complaints were Unilever and McDonald's)

*Food complaints top 2002 advertising blacklist*  
(28 May 2003) [www.foodnavigator.com](http://www.foodnavigator.com)

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## Weak statutory controls

In most countries, the food industry continues to have unfettered access to children. However, several countries recognise that some form of child protection is needed, and have introduced statutory regulation, or made government recommendations for strengthened voluntary controls. However, comparisons of controls on advertising to children reveal a patchwork of different rules in different countries:

- The Belgium Flemish region does not permit advertising five minutes before and after programmes for children under 12.
- Denmark allows no advertising breaks during programmes and in 2000 implemented a voluntary ban on advertising to children (overturned in 2002).
- Norway is seeking a ban on advertisements before, during or after children's programmes.
- With some narrow exceptions for certain types of magazines, the Canadian province of Quebec has for the past two decades prohibited all advertising directed at children under the age of 13.
- Sweden does not permit advertising aimed at children under 12, does not allow programmes to be interrupted by advertising and does not permit advertising before or after children's programmes.
- In Australia there is a ban on all advertising during pre-school children's programmes.
- In the Netherlands there are limits on the volume of advertising during children's programmes.
- In Finland, McDonald's cannot promote toys in its advertisements.
- In Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, characters or presenters from children's programmes cannot appear in advertisements.
- In the US, complaints can be made to the Federal Trade Commission, state regulators or self-regulatory bodies, but none are obliged to respond. Delays are common: for example, a routine consumer group complaint over deceptive advertising involving calcium claims for Kraft Cheese took seven years to resolve.

Sources: ● TransAtlantic Consumer Dialogue; ● Hawkes, C. (2002) *Marketing practices of fast-food and soft drinks multinationals: A review*, in Globalization, diets and noncommunicable diseases. Geneva: WHO; ● Centre for Science in the Public Interest (Canada); ● Quebec Consumer Protection Act, RSQ cP40.1, ss 248, 249, and the Regulations Respecting the Application of the Consumer Protection Act ss.87-90; ● National Heart Forum UK; ● LEGIS: The European Advertising Lawyers' Association newsletter (2003) 1989-2009: *The last 10 years and predictions for the next 10*. www.marketinglaw.co.uk ● AAAA Bulletin (March 2003), from the American Association of Advertising; ● Survey responses from international consumer groups

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'There is a case for adopting the precautionary principle for the marketing of foods to children. Industry should be asked to take a more responsible approach to the promotion (especially to children) of foods high in fat, salt and added sugars, and balance this with the promotion of healthier options, including fruit and vegetables.'

UK Chief Medical Officer's report (2003)

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**In-school promotions** – This report could find no evidence of national legislation to control food marketing in schools. In the US, where such marketing has been common for over a decade, the government's General Accounting Office stated, '*Although commercial activities in schools are covered by general federal and state laws that apply to all businesses or that govern school finance... In the districts we visited, local school board policies differed in terms of the number and types of activities they addressed, but most delegated responsibility to superintendents and principals, who often make decisions on a case by case basis.*' Some states have statutes or regulations concerning commercial activities in schools, but specifics of the statutes vary. Laws in only two states – California and North Carolina – address indirect advertising in schools (see pages 15 and 22 for more on commercial food promotion in schools).

## Section 5: Public health interventions: Do they work?

Public education and 'counter marketing' programmes aimed at balancing the effects of intensive marketing of health-damaging products have been proven to make some contribution to modifying unhealthy behaviours at a population level, and may offer a part of the solution to unhealthy eating habits.

Successful 'positive' marketing campaigns also strengthen the argument that marketing approaches can change behaviour – whether towards unhealthy or healthy eating habits. This is a factor that advertisers are often quick to deny when challenged about the health effects of advertising fatty and sugary brands.

However, it is important to note that even government-funded five-a-day programmes receive very little financial support. In the US, the 'five-a-day' programme receives \$2m per year. Meanwhile, Hershey promotes its chocolate products with a budget of \$200m.<sup>1</sup>

### Promoting fruit and vegetable consumption

Two UK-based projects demonstrate how consumption of healthier foods, such as fruits and vegetables, can be successfully promoted to children by systematic and sustained interventions, based on well-researched principles of public-health promotion.



**The Grab 5! Project** is a programme devised and run by the not-for-profit organisation, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming. It is a school-based intervention promoting fruit and vegetable consumption among 7-11-year-olds in low-income areas. An independent scientific evaluation of the project concluded: *'Children's consumption of fruit and vegetables increased, particularly for fruit. Evaluation researchers also recorded improved awareness and knowledge about fruit and vegetables amongst children. Furthermore, there was evidence of a modest reduction in consumption of high-fat snacks.'*<sup>2</sup> [www.grab5.com](http://www.grab5.com)



**The Food Dudes** is a healthy eating scheme devised and run by the Bangor Food Research Unit at Aberystwyth University in Wales. It is a school-based intervention founded on research into the psychological factors that influence children's food choices. *'In all schools, the Food Dudes programme resulted in highly significant increases in pupils' fruit and vegetable consumption. Some of the largest % increases were seen in the most socially deprived areas. [In one area], lunchtime consumption of fruit increased by 150%, vegetables by 315%.'* [www.fooddudes.co.uk](http://www.fooddudes.co.uk)

In the US, **Eat well and keep moving** is a programme created using existing school resources and staff to promote healthy eating and increased physical activity. Interventions are embedded into core subject teaching and integrated with the catering services and parents. This has been shown to *'Decrease the percent of total calories from fat and saturated fat consumed by students, increase fruit and vegetable consumption [and] reduce TV viewing time'*.<sup>3</sup>

The *1% or less* campaign, created by the US Center for Science in the Public Interest, aimed to reduce the total level of saturated fat consumption among children and adults by getting people to switch to 1% or fat-free milk from 2% or higher milk. A targeted marketing campaign used:

- Paid advertisements on TV and radio and in newspapers;
- Milk taste tests and nutrition presentations at supermarkets, workplaces, schools and churches;
- Point-of-sale promotions in shops;
- School activities and contests.

The campaign *'doubled the market share of 1% or fat-free milk in seven weeks in two West Virginia communities'*.



Source: CSPI *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, December 2000. See also: [www.cspinet.org/nutrition/1less.htm](http://www.cspinet.org/nutrition/1less.htm)

1. Nestle, M. (2002) *Food Politics*, University of California Press

2. Edmunds, L; Jones, C (2003) *Evaluation of the Sustain Grab 5! school fruit and vegetable project*. Oxford: British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group. See: [www.grab5.com](http://www.grab5.com)

3. Gortmaker, SL *et al* (1999) *Eat Well and Keep Moving*, in *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, Sep 1999;153 (9):975-83

# Public health interventions: Do they work?

Marketing can also be used to promote healthier diets and lifestyles, and is likely to be an important feature of policies seeking to improve public health. This approach is used by trade groups to present their food categories as contributing to good nutrition. Advertising, websites, offers and other promotional materials have also been used to promote breastfeeding and to reduced tobacco use. Such activities can influence not only individual choices, but can also serve either to contract or expand whole-category consumption of certain foods and products.

## Promotions of food categories funded by industry

‘Check-off programs’ in the US are federally sanctioned and administered public relations enterprises to support certain food commodities – such as beef, dairy, eggs and peanuts. They are designed to support the farming industry through commercials that emphasise health benefits, such as vitamin B and iron in meat, and calcium in dairy, in order to encourage Americans to consume more of these products.

In the UK, similar promotions are financed by, for instance, the dairy and meat industries through the Dairy Council and the Meat & Livestock Commission. These organisations are credited with promoting consumption of these products, and maintaining the perception of their central importance in the British diet. These organisations run seminars, design and finance advertising campaigns, produce educational materials and lobby national, regional and international government.

Sources: Check-off Programs – *Food Politics* (Marion Nestle) published by University of California Press; UK programmes – The Food Commission (UK)

## Promoting of breastfeeding

Increasing awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding have been brought about by a combination of a code of practice (and enforcement) and professional and community involvement, supported by public relations activities. The international code prevents advertising of breastmilk substitutes to the public. As the Director of the Pan American Health Organization Mirta Roses Periago says: *‘These measures, especially when [the code is] vigorously monitored, have been extremely effective in improving breastfeeding practices and infant and young child health.’*

Correspondence with Mirta Roses Periago, 2003

## Lessons from interventions aimed at reducing cigarette smoking

Campaigns to curb the prevalence of tobacco-smoking amongst young people may offer many pointers to action that could be taken to improve the diets of children and their families.

According to the US campaign group Tobacco Free Kids *‘An effective public education campaign ... should consist of a variety of paid media efforts (television, radio, print, outdoor) but must also include... non-traditional venues such as the Internet, street marketing, and other special events.’*

The US Surgeon General’s report, *Reducing Tobacco Use* also comments that *‘School-based programs can have a significant impact on smoking behavior among young people and are most effective when part of a comprehensive, community-based effort.’* Translated into the area of food policy, this suggests the need for broad-based public-health action to improve diet that supports not only

restrictions on unhealthy food marketing, but which uses the best techniques of marketing to promote healthier living – making good food an attractive choice.

These conclusions are backed up by research conducted by the US government’s Centers for Disease Control, which have stated, *‘Campaigns that are combined with other activities to reduce tobacco use are effective in (1) reducing consumption of tobacco products, and (2) increasing cessation among tobacco users’* and that *‘The results of mass media campaigns should be applicable in most settings and populations. Studies reviewed worked with a variety of populations across geographic regions within the United States’.*

Guide to community preventive services: *Effectiveness of mass media campaigns to reduce initiation of tobacco use and increase cessation* – [www.thecommunityguide.org/tobacco/tobac-int-mass-media.pdf](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/tobacco/tobac-int-mass-media.pdf)

# Media literacy and principles for promoting healthier lifestyles

Media literacy is a tool used to combat the effect of advertising on children, aiming to give young people analytical tools to understand how the media influences their thoughts and actions.



**In the US**, the Public Broadcast Service runs an interactive website to help 'detective' children see through the spin of advertisers, with the help of games and humour. The *Don't Buy It* site reveals how advertisers manipulate

images and descriptions to make products seem more appealing. It also helps children learn how advertisements work, challenging them to identify marketing tactics in familiar scenarios. Children can design a Freaky Flakes cereal box and write their own captions. Another section deals with the tricks used in food advertising: [www.pbs.org/dontbuyit/](http://www.pbs.org/dontbuyit/).

**In Canada**, media literacy has been a mandated element of the national curriculum since 2000.<sup>1</sup>

**In the UK**, a 'media literacy' project called MediaSmart (funded largely by the advertising and food industries) does not treat food advertising as a distinct subject, nor does it tackle media literacy with regard to interpreting nutritional and health claims.<sup>2</sup> It is designed for 6-11 year olds, although marketing is also targeted at pre-school children.

Unfortunately, there appears to be little or no evaluation of whether media literacy programmes have any positive impact on children's food choices.

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'Today's students live in an information and entertainment culture that is dominated by images, both moving and static. Information, visual, and media literacy... have a significant role to play in helping students to select, assimilate, evaluate, and control the immense amount of information and the diverse messages produced every day in a complex information and entertainment culture.'

Foundation for Language Arts for Atlantic Canada (2003)

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## Principles underpinning effective interventions to promote healthier lifestyles

Available research and experience indicates that a public education campaign to promote healthy eating needs to include:

- Use of paid media, public relations and special events and promotions in a co-ordinated effort with school and community programmes.
- Access to funding so the media component can achieve the reach necessary for sustained effect.
- Freedom from competition from better-funded promotions for products and practices that undermine healthy choices.
- Freedom from industry pressures, with no restrictions on the content of the messages
- Programme design governed by independent nutritionists and public-health promotion

specialists, and involving young people.

- Creation of opportunities for increased and enjoyable physical activity to compliment the healthy eating message.
- Grounding in rigorous research on effectiveness.
- Incorporation of opportunities for evaluation, feedback and ongoing modifications to the campaign.
- Full support for the campaign from local and national governments.

Many other factors will also affect the success of healthy-eating promotions, including product labels, catering in work-place canteens and restaurants, sales tax policies, etc. See page 29 for more details.

Adapted from *Public Education Campaigns to Reduce Tobacco Use*, US National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids (2003) by Meg Gallogly

1. Media Literacy Clearinghouse: An Introduction to Media Literacy. [www.med.sc.edu:1081/medlit101.htm](http://www.med.sc.edu:1081/medlit101.htm)

2. Email correspondence (2002) with Ergo Communications, the public-relations company running MediaSmart

## End note: Not only children, not just marketing

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This report argues the need to control the marketing of unhealthy foods to children and calls upon the World Health Organization to assist in this endeavour. However, the members of IACFO wish to emphasise that there are a great many additional policy solutions to diet-related disease that could benefit children and the population as a whole.

Such additional policy measures could include, for instance, action to:

- Impose sales taxes on energy-dense, low-nutrient foods and drinks
- Remove sales taxes on healthful foods, e.g. fruit and vegetables in restaurants
- Remove tax-deductibility of advertising costs for energy-dense low-nutrient foods
- Offer tax benefits for promotion of healthful foods
- Require quantitative ingredient declarations on pre-packaged foods<sup>1</sup>
- Require calorie and fat labelling on menus and display boards in restaurants
- Review the 'technological need' for cosmetic colour and flavour additives in energy-dense low-nutrient foods
- Restrict or prohibit health claims on energy-dense, low-nutrient foods<sup>2</sup>
- Promote breastfeeding policy implementation and prohibit the promotion of breastmilk substitutes
- Promote work-place health legislation to include nutrition and physical activity criteria
- Improve health worker training in nutrition and physical activity
- Include nutrition and physical activity counselling in health-insurance policies
- Strengthen controls on the marketing of weight-loss products and programmes
- Encourage pre-school, school and college nutrition and health policies, covering teaching, catering and physical activity
- Encourage community and municipal planning authorities to ensure healthful food supplies and safe, sustainable transport policies
- Encourage and promote the diversity of culture and cuisine experienced through healthful foods

<sup>1</sup> See IACFO report on *Quantitative Ingredient Declarations*: [www.cspinet.org/reports/codex/QUID.html](http://www.cspinet.org/reports/codex/QUID.html)

<sup>2</sup> See IACFO report on *Health Claims and Functional Foods*: [www.cspinet.org/reports/functional\\_foods/](http://www.cspinet.org/reports/functional_foods/)

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### Published by the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO)

The International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO), founded in 1997, is an alliance of non-governmental organizations that represent consumer interests in the areas of food safety, nutrition and related matters. IACFO was formed to address the lack of consumer representation in the debate over global food trade and to work with international agencies responsible for harmonizing standards relating to the production, distribution and sale of foods. The founding members are: The Food Commission (UK), the Center for Science in the Public Interest (USA), the Centre for Science in the Public Interest (Canada) and the Japan Offspring Fund. For more information about this report, contact: The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7837 2250; fax: +44 (0)20 7837 1141; email: [iacfo@foodcomm.org.uk](mailto:iacfo@foodcomm.org.uk). IACFO members do not accept any funding from members of the food industry.

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