

AD BRAKE

PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF UNHEALTHY FOOD ADVERTISING ON TV

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I asked my mum if I could have it and she said 'no' and I was annoyed and I kept trying and she finally said 'yes' and I got to go to the shops to get it” Girl, Primary 5

Being overweight or obese is the single biggest preventable cause of cancer after smoking and is associated with 10 different types of cancer and 18,100 cancer cases a year in the UK^{1,2}. If current trends in obesity continue, it could lead to 670,000 new cases of cancer over the next 20 years³. The total economic loss from obesity to the UK was calculated at £49 billion in 2012⁴.

Children who are obese are more likely to go on to become obese adults⁵. In order to combat the rising impact of children’s obesity on the health of the nation, a range of measures are needed⁶⁻⁸. A comprehensive childhood obesity strategy is required which includes measures to address: food advertising and promotion, a sugary drink tax and product reformulation.

HOW ADVERTISING IMPACTS ON CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOURS

Research has shown that promoting of food products to children can influence their behaviour in a number of ways, including their food preferences, purchase behaviour

and food consumption⁹⁻¹⁴. Evidence also suggests that junk food advertising can result in children ‘pestering’ their parents, prompting more purchasing of unhealthy foods that would otherwise not have been bought^{15, 16}.

We need regulations to stop junk food advertising on TV before the 9pm watershed to prevent children being exposed to these adverts. Restrictions already exist during children’s TV shows¹⁷. However most children watch television between 7pm and 8pm¹⁸, when family programmes are typically shown and the current restrictions do not apply. Closing this loophole would more than halve children’s exposure to advertising¹¹ and help change children’s behaviour towards unhealthy foods.

WHAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO

Restrict junk food advertising on TV until after the 9pm watershed to reduce children’s exposure to junk food marketing

PUBLIC BACKS ACTION TO TACKLE OBESITY

Q Would you support or oppose introducing a ban on junk food advertising on TV before the 9pm watershed?



Source: YouGov survey, sample size of 1,774 UK adults
LET'S BEAT CANCER SOONER
cruk.org



JUNK FOOD TV ADVERTS RESULT IN CHILDREN'S "PESTER POWER"



KEY FINDINGS

This research shows that, despite current regulations, children are still engaging with junk food advertising on television:

- Children are watching junk food adverts in the evenings and on weekends during family programmes, exposing the loophole in the current legislation.

"I watch TV with my dad about seven o'clock because my, because my dad's not there in the day and I'm at school and that's the only times we really watch it together." Girl, Year 4^a

- TV advertising results in children pestering their parents that can lead to the purchase of junk food.

"If I've seen it on an advert, and I've seen it in a shop I think to myself 'Is that, is that already in the store? Because I really want that'... and I said: 'Mum...'" Boy, Year 4^b

- Children have a good level of nutritional knowledge, however they find that watching junk food advertising tempts them into eating unhealthy foods.

"I don't normally think of [sweet] but when I see [sweet] I just want them!" Girl, Year 6^b

This study shows the impact of these adverts over time.

Immediate effect – adverts can make children hungry and want to eat junk food.

"It kind of makes you feel like hungry because you think...when you see something tasty on TV it makes you 'Oh I wish I had that'" Boy, Year 6^a

Medium term effect – after seeing the adverts some children then pester their parents to buy junk food.

"My little sister, because she saw [sweet advert] and went straight to my mum and said: "Mummy can I please buy this? Can I please buy this? Can I please buy this?" Girl, Year 6^a

Long term effect – in the supermarket children can remember the adverts and then want to buy those specific products.

"You maybe see an advert and then you like forget about it ... but then you see it in the shops ... and you remember the advert and like you say "Oh are we going to have that?" Boy, Primary 5^b

METHODOLOGY

Cancer Research UK commissioned the National Centre for Social Research to investigate how children engage with unhealthy food advertising on television. This qualitative study was conducted in 25 focus groups across six UK primary schools.

^a English school year

^b Scottish school year

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CANCER RESEARCH UK

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This project has been commissioned by the Cancer Research UK Policy Research Centre for Cancer Prevention. For more information on this study please contact PRCP-team@cancer.org.uk

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