

Junk food marketing and childhood obesity: the evidence

Obesity and cancer

Regularly eating high calorie food and drink - which usually has higher levels of fat and sugar - increases the risk of becoming overweight or obese. Obesity is the second biggest preventable cause of cancer in the UK after smoking and is linked to 13 types of cancer including bowel, breast, and pancreatic.¹

Rates of childhood obesity are at an all-time high in the UK, with 1 in 3 children aged 2-15 overweight or obese. An obese child is around five times more likely to remain so as an adult², so acting early can protect them from a lifetime of avoidable ill-health and disease.

Our research on junk food marketing and obesity

Cancer Research UK's Cancer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) has published a series of reports in 2018 which add to the existing evidence base confirming junk food advertising has a significant impact on what food and drink children and young people consume.

These reports mainly focus on the impact of junk food advertising on TV, but our most recent research is building the evidence on digital and online marketing.

10 Years On: New evidence on TV marketing and junk food eating amongst 11-19 year olds 10 years after broadcast regulations

Under Pressure: New evidence of young people's broadcast marketing exposure in the UK

A Prime Time for Action: New evidence on the link between television and on-demand marketing and obesity

See it, Want it, Buy it, Eat it: How food advertising is associated with unhealthy eating behaviours in 7-11 year old children

All reports and executive summaries can be downloaded from www.cruk.org/CPRC

Key findings: TV

Junk food advertising on TV is a clear, consistent and cumulative risk factor for high junk food consumption and increased weight amongst young people. This is seen across all ages of young people, and for advertising on both television and streaming/on-demand.

- **Primary school children watch an average of 22 hours of TV per week**, 12 hours of which are commercial TV where they are potentially exposed to advertising.
- **The more junk food ads on TV young people see, the more they eat** – and that could amount to over 500 extra snacks throughout the year.
- **Recalling one broadcast junk food advert a day predicts an extra 18,000 calories consumed in a year**, or almost 350 calories per week.
- **Young people feel under pressure from the obesogenic environment to eat unhealthily**, and this pressure is felt more by those who are obese.
- **Teenagers have more than twice the risk of being obese if they could remember seeing a junk food advert every day** compared to those who couldn't recall any over a month.
- **Lower recall of junk food marketing is linked to a significantly lower risk to being obese.**

- **Watching more than 3 hours of TV per day makes children more likely to buy and eat junk food products** than those who watch little to no TV

BROADCAST MARKETING HAS A LARGE INFLUENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIETS



Key findings: online

- **Primary school children spend on average 16 hours on the Internet per week**, and 4 out of 5 of the most popular websites that children visit in their free time display adverts.
- **Children who used the Internet for over 3 hours per day are almost 4 times more likely to buy junk food products** than children who used the Internet for little or no time.
- **Each additional hour children spend using the internet is associated with a 19% increased chance of pestering their parents for junk food.**
- **Children who used the Internet for over 3 hours per day had a 68% reduction in vegetable intake** compared to children who spent little or no time on the Internet.

CHILDREN WHO USE THE INTERNET FOR MORE THAN 3 HOURS PER DAY...

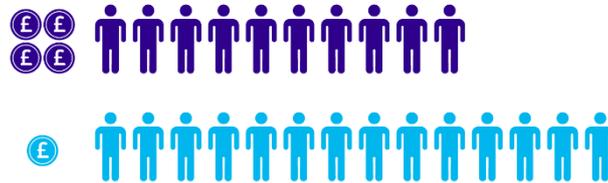


Addressing health inequalities

Teens from the most deprived communities were 40% more likely to remember junk food advertisements every day compared to teens from better-off families.

Previous research has shown that people from more deprived communities are also more at risk of being obese.

JUNK FOOD AD RECALL WAS ASSOCIATED WITH WEALTH INEQUALITIES



YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE MORE DEPRIVED GROUP WERE FOUND TO BE
1.4 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO RECALL SEEING JUNK FOOD ADVERTS EVERY DAY.

The importance of these reports

- Adds to the existing evidence base confirming junk food advertising on TV has an impact on what food and drink children and young people consume.
- Provides important insight into the importance of both TV and online to young audiences, quantifying the time spent by children watching TV and on the Internet.
- Adds to the evidence of changes to young people's TV viewing habits since 2007: both on the types of programming most watched by children, and the increased viewing of on-demand and streaming channels.
- Provides the strongest evidence yet ads on streaming/on-demand channels have a similar impact on junk food consumption as those on TV.
- Provides evidence to support the recent CAP move to protecting under 16s, and continue exploring the need for all rules to be extended to cover 16-17 year olds too.

Policy recommendations

Tackling children's obesity requires a UK-wide, whole-systems approach that prioritises interventions aimed at reducing unhealthy choices in the obesogenic environment, empowering and giving choice back to parents and families. Although there is no silver bullet to reduce obesity, there is overwhelming evidence that junk food marketing impacts children's eating habits. Failure to effectively restrict junk food marketing on TV and online will undermine the progress that could be made by existing policies.

We welcome Government's ambition, set out in the Childhood Obesity Plan Chapter 2, to halve childhood obesity rates by 2030. We believe that the following measures should be key priorities for implementation:

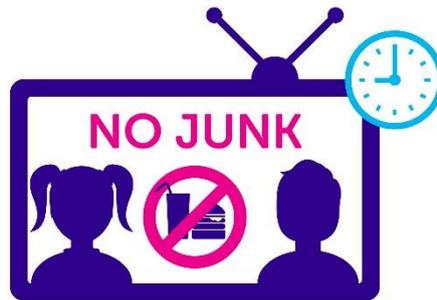
Restricting HFSS advertising on TV until after the 9pm watershed

Cancer Research UK wants to stop junk food advertising during the shows children watch the most, with a specific focus on evening and family time that is currently exempted through loopholes. This will give children the best chance to eat healthily, stay a healthy weight and avoid cancer in later life.

We are calling for Government to update the current rules to better reflect what children watch on TV and online through extending existing regulations to restrict junk food advertising on TV until

after the 9pm watershed. These restrictions should apply to content watched on-demand and online.

LET'S EASE THE PRESSURE ON YOUNG PEOPLE



TIME FOR JUNK FOOD AD RESTRICTIONS BEFORE 9PM

Introduce similar protections for children exposed to advertising online

To ensure that children are completely protected from advertising on all platforms, and to create a level playing field between advertisers on TV and online, Government must introduce equivalent regulation of digital junk food marketing.

Implement the Childhood Obesity Plan in full

Measures to restrict junk food marketing should be supported by implementation of other measures set out in the Childhood Obesity Plan Chapter 2, to help to create environment that supports families to make healthy choices.

For any questions relating to this briefing, please contact Malcolm Clark Policy Manager (Cancer Prevention), Cancer Research UK at 020 3469 8095, malcolm.clark@cancer.org.uk or @CRUK_Policy

¹ CRUK website <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/obesity-weight-and-cancer>

² Simmonds, M., et al, Predicting adult obesity from childhood obesity: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *Obesity reviews: an official journal of the International Association for the Study of Obesity*. 17(2): 95-107. 2016