

Unhealthy Food and Beverage Marketing to Children: The Basics

Food Marketing and Health:



The overwhelmingly unhealthy food-marketing environment that surrounds young people is a significant contributor to the dramatic increase in childhood obesity.

- [Institute of Medicine, 2006](#)
- [White House, 2010](#)
- World Health Organization, [2010](#), [2016](#)

Food marketing increases children's preferences and requests to parents for advertised products, likely contributes to less healthful diets, and may increase negative, diet-related health outcomes and risks.

- [Institute of Medicine, 2006](#)

Food marketing studies show:



- Exposure to television food advertising increases children's consumption of any available snack food.¹
- Prior exposure to soft drink and fast food advertising is associated with greater consumption of these products.²
- Exposure to television food advertising is associated with poor diet and higher childhood obesity rates.³

1. [Halford, Gillespie, Brown, et. al., 2004](#); [Halford, Boyland, Hughes, et. al., 2007](#); [Harris, Bargh, & Brownell, 2009](#)

2. [Andreyeva, Kelly, & Harris, 2011](#); [Dalton, Longacre, Drake, et.al., 2011](#)

3. [Zimmerman & Bell, 2010](#); [Kelly, Freeman, King, et. al., 2015](#)

The **unfair** nature of advertising to children:



Advertising to children younger than 8 is unfair. Young children lack the cognitive ability to understand the persuasive intent of advertising, a necessary skill to counteract its influence.

- [American Psychological Association, 2004](#)



It may be virtually impossible for any child or adolescent to defend against the most common food marketing practices.

- [Food Marketing Defense Model, 2009](#)

What can be done?

Although government regulation of food advertising in the media faces barriers due to the First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution, which protects commercial speech, legal scholars propose that restrictions on food marketing to children do not conflict with the First Amendment.

Government can intervene

The Federal Trade Commission also has the authority to regulate food advertising to young children.

State attorneys general can take action against unfair marketing practices.

Public health advocates, the food and beverage industry, parents, teens, and policy makers can also play a role in supporting policies that decrease unhealthy food marketing to children.