



Food Marketing to Children

Food marketing to children

- Companies market food to children on television, on the radio, on the Internet, in magazines, through product placement in movies and video games, in schools, on product packages, as toys, on clothing and other merchandise, and almost anywhere where a logo or product image can be shown.
- Food marketing techniques include the use of: spokes-characters, celebrities, cartoons, premiums, collectibles, games, contests, kids' clubs, and more.
- The total amount spent on food marketing to children is about \$10 billion a year.¹



Kellogg's FunKtown web site features 'advergames' – sugary cereal and fruit snack marketing built into fun electronic games.

Food marketing to children works

There is no disputing the fact that the goal of food marketing is to influence children's food choices.

- Companies clearly believe that marketing works or they wouldn't spend billions of dollars a year on it.
- According to a comprehensive review in 2005 by the National Academies' Institute of Medicine, studies demonstrate that television food advertising affects children's food choices, food purchase requests, diets, and health.¹
- Based on an extensive review of the research, the American Psychological Association concluded that until the age of about 8 years old children are unable to understand the persuasive intent of advertisements.²
- Any parent can tell you that ads and cartoon characters on food packages affect not only which foods their children ask them to purchase, but which foods their kids are willing to eat.

Marketed foods typically are of poor nutritional quality

The reason marketing has a negative effect on children's well-being is because the overwhelming majority of marketing is for foods of poor nutritional quality.

- About 80% of foods advertised on television shows intended for children are for convenience/fast foods and sweets.³
- A 2000-calorie diet of advertised foods would exceed the USDA recommended guidelines for sodium and provide nearly 1 cup of added sugar.³
- Fast-food and sugary cereals are the most heavily advertised foods on children's television.



“Current food and beverage marketing practices put children's long-term health at risk.”

National Academies' Institute of Medicine, 2005

Marketing of foods of poor nutritional quality undermines parental authority

Parents, of course, bear the primary responsibility for feeding their children but parents are outmaneuvered by aggressive food marketers:

- Parental authority is undermined by wide discrepancies between what parents tell their children is healthful to eat and what marketing promotes as desirable to eat.
- While many parents have limited nutrition knowledge, companies have extensive expertise in persuasive techniques.
- Companies have resources to influence children's food choices that parents don't have, like cartoon characters, great music, celebrities, contests, and toy give-aways.



Guidelines for food marketing to children

Food and beverage companies, retail stores, broadcasters, and schools should market foods responsibly to children. The table below includes some examples of responsible marketing. For more information, see CSPI's *Guidelines for Responsible Marketing to Children*, available at <http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/kidsmarketingguidelines.pdf>.

Food & beverage companies should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only promote and advertise healthful foods. • Not encourage children to nag their parents to buy low-nutrition foods. • Develop new and reformulated products that help children eat healthfully, especially with regard to nutrient density, energy density, and portion size. • Refrain from using product or brand placements for low-nutrition foods in media aimed at children, such as movies, television shows, video games, websites, books, and textbooks. • Only use cartoon characters, games, and premiums to market healthful foods.
Retail Stores should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace low-nutrition foods with more healthful foods or non-food items at checkout. • Place low-nutrition products on shelves above young children's eye level.
Schools should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not allow companies to market, sell, or give away low-nutrition foods or brands anywhere on school campuses, including through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Selling low-nutrition foods. ○ Displaying logos, brand names, spokes-characters, product names, or other product marketing on/in vending machines, or curricula, and other educational materials. ○ Using educational and other incentive programs that provide food as a reward or provide schools with money or school supplies when families buy a company's food products.

For more information, see CSPI's report ***Pestering Parents*** at www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/pesteringparents and additional resources at www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy.



¹ Institute of Medicine. *Food Marketing to Children: Threat or Opportunity?* Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2006.

² Kunkel D. et al. *Psychological Issues in the Increasing Commercialization of Childhood: Report of the APA Task Force on Advertising and Children*. Washington: American Psychological Association, 2004.

³ Harrison K, Marske AL. "Nutritional Content of Foods Advertised During the Television Programs Children Watch Most" *American Journal of Public Health*, 2005, vol 95, no. 9, pp. 1568-1574.