

JUNK FOOD INJUNCTION

2008 AUTUMN EDITION



The
Cancer
Council
New South Wales

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Thank you to everyone who responded to our call to action in the last Junk Food Injunction newsletter (Summer 2008) with details about food company sponsorship practices in children's sport. Your reports have indicated that sports sponsorship is definitely an area that food marketers are using to target children, with promotional activities ranging from free food vouchers, branded sports certificates, drink bottles and even sports uniforms (so that children themselves act as mobile advertisements). The Cancer Council NSW plans to investigate sports sponsorship to children further, with the aim of exposing the marketing tactics used by food companies and to advocate for sensible restrictions in the type of food and drink companies that can sponsor children's sport.

In this edition of Junk Food Injunction we describe two different codes for food marketing to children; the recently revised advertising industry code and Consumers International's recommendations for an International Code for Marketing to Children. We also report on research exploring children's exposure to food advertising on their way to and from school and a new Parents Jury campaign for improvements to food labelling.

ADVERTISERS THE KINGS OF SPIN

The Australian Association of National Advertisers has released their revised Advertising to Children Code. The stated aims of this code are to develop and maintain a high level of social responsibility in advertising to children, whilst keeping in mind 'prevailing community standards'. Disappointingly, the revised code neither promotes responsible food and beverage marketing to children, nor addresses many key community concerns related to this advertising.

The media release accompanying the new code claimed that the updated code prohibits 'pester power', whereby children urge their parents to purchase a product. However in actuality, the revised code merely includes a provision that stops advertisers from making a direct appeal to children to ask their parents for the product. In most instances, other features of marketing, such as competitions, give-aways and the appealing nature of the advertisement itself, indirectly encourage children to request the product and pester their parents to buy the food. And yet, these other marketing techniques are still permissible in advertisements to children under the new code.

Revisions to the code concentrate mostly on the prohibition of sexual imagery in advertising to children and the sexualisation of children. With the current Senate Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the media, this new code appears to be yet another industry attempt to deflect government advertising regulations.

While the advertising industry claims to have incorporated community views in their review process, it appears that the appeals of many health groups and parents have been largely ignored. In the summer 2008 edition of Junk Food Injunction, we outlined our key responses to the Australian Association of National Advertisers in the review of this code. Specifically, we urged them to address the real issues related to advertising to children, including the types of food and beverages that are promoted to children, the time of day that these are shown on television, and the promotional techniques within advertisements, such as the use of promotional characters and premium offers. None of these issues have been adequately addressed in the revised code.

WORLDWIDE APPEAL: THOUSANDS LEND THEIR SUPPORT TO AN INTERNATIONAL FOOD MARKETING CODE

To coincide with the 2008 World Consumer Rights Day, aptly named 'Junk Food Generation', Consumers International and the International Obesity Taskforce released their recommendations for an International Code of Marketing of Foods and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children on 16 March.

It is hoped that the World Health Organization will adopt this international code, with governments subsequently incorporating the Code into national food marketing laws. The broad reach of these international organisations, with the support of over 220 member organisations and 10,000 individual members combined, adds substantial weight to this proposed code.

The scope of this code is wide, and includes an absolute exclusion of all forms of marketing for foods that are considered to be high in fat, sugar and/or salt. This includes both:

- broadcast media; the restriction of all unhealthy food advertisements on television and radio between 6am and 9pm, and
- non-broadcast media; restricting the use of promotional characters (celebrities, cartoons and branded characters), premium offers (competitions and give-aways), branded games, packaging appealing to children and sponsorship associated with unhealthy food products. Subversive food marketing through new media including mobile phone messaging and social network websites, such as Facebook and YouTube, would also be restricted.

The Cancer Council NSW supports this proposed international code and urges government to adopt a comprehensive food marketing code that will protect Australian children from all forms of unhealthy food marketing.

FOOD MAGAZINE: CAMPAIGNING FOR SAFER, HEALTHIER FOOD IN THE UK

The Food Commission is a not-for-profit organisation based in the United Kingdom that has been campaigning for safer and healthier food for the past twenty years.

Their quarterly publication, Food Magazine, contains interesting information about issues related to diet and health. While based on research and experiences from the United Kingdom, included articles relating to food marketing to children are particularly relevant to us here in Australia. Many of the marketing techniques that are observed in the United Kingdom are mirrored by food companies in Australia. Further, watching and learning from the United Kingdom experience following the introduction of new television food advertising restrictions in January 2008, provides valuable insights into appropriate advertising restrictions for Australia.

To find out more about this magazine or to subscribe, visit <http://www.foodcomm.org.uk/fmag.htm>



WALKING TO SCHOOL NOT AS HEALTHY AS ORIGINALLY THOUGHT?

In 2007, researchers at the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity at the University of Sydney conducted a study to measure the amount and type of outdoor food advertising that children in NSW are regularly exposed to as they travel to and from school.

By systematically scouring a 500-metre radius around forty primary schools in Sydney and Wollongong, the researchers identified the most frequently advertised food and drink products in these areas as soft drink, alcohol, coffee and ice cream. This food advertising clearly undermines healthy eating programs within schools.

One of the most heavily advertised locations in this study was found to be around the Manly Corso with 346 food advertisements per square km in this area, compared to an average of 79 food advertisements per square km across all other school locations. However, recently introduced advertising restrictions from Manly Council may yet provide some relief to bombarded children, with new regulations in place to remove third-party advertising on shop fronts. In March, 40 Manly businesses received notices to remove advertisements from their shop windows, awnings and shop signs, or potentially face large fines and prosecution.

Actions to reduce the sale and advertising of unhealthy food and drinks near schools are also being introduced in other countries, with the Korean Food and Drug administration recently introducing legislation banning the sale and promotion of unhealthy food within a 200 metre radius from schools, called 'Green Food Zones', starting from next year.

Unfortunately the Australian government is not nearly as effectual in protecting children from unhealthy food marketing, with no restrictions on the volume of outdoor food advertisements near schools, nor any limitations on the types of food and beverage products, including alcohol, that can be advertised in this environment. Clear and consistent regulations are required to curb unhealthy food advertising around schools. The current onus on local councils to impose their own planning regulations does not go far enough to protect children from food marketing.

CFAC REVAMPED

The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC) has recently launched their new website, now available at <http://www.cfac.net.au/>.

This new website provides comprehensive information on food advertising to children in Australia, and a clear and informative overview of CFAC activities, campaigns, submissions and research, as well as useful links.

Visit <http://www.cfac.net.au/> today!



Coalition on Food Advertising to Children

2020 VISION

The 2020 Summit, held in Canberra in April, provided a unique opportunity for Australians to input into the nation's future directions and to tackle challenges confronting Australia.

Very encouragingly the theme 'Make healthy food choices easy' was recognised as one of the top ideas in the Long-term National Health Strategy discussion theme. This theme included actions such as banning the marketing of junk food to children and easier to understand food labels, such as the introduction of a 'traffic light' guide on food products, to help consumers choose healthier food products. While obviously not all ideas raised at the summit will be implemented into practice, this represents a significant step forward in putting this issue on the government's agenda.

In a nutshell

- The revised advertising industry's Advertising to Children Code fails to address community concerns about unhealthy food marketing to children.
- Recommendations for an International Code for Food Marketing to Children has been released, calling for broad and inclusive restrictions on all forms of unhealthy food marketing to children.
- New research indicates that children are heavily exposed to unhealthy food advertisements on their way to and from school.
- Banning unhealthy food marketing to children was listed as one of the top health ideas at the government's 2020 summit.

Real kids' food: Healthy Recipes

Roasted Tomato Soup with Creative Croutons

Serves 6



Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1kg vine-ripened tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 3 garlic cloves
- 600ml salt reduced vegetable stock
- 100g alphabet pasta
- 2 slices wholegrain toast

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C.
2. Heat oil in a shallow ovenproof casserole dish; add onion and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes or until softened.
3. Add tomatoes and garlic and season with pepper.
4. Roast uncovered in oven for 20 minutes, then allow mixture to cool.
5. Puree in a blender, adding a little of the stock if the mixture is too thick. Return to pan and add remaining stock.
6. Bring to the boil, add pasta and simmer for 10 minutes.
7. Cut stars from toast slices with a star cutter, and serve with soup.

Source: Delicious Magazine - July 2004, Page 95

Top 5 tips for Understanding Food Labels

The Parents Jury, a web based forum for parents that focuses on improving children's food and physical activity environments, is currently campaigning for an honest and informative labelling system on food packages. Such a food labelling system will help consumers to interpret nutrition information on packages: an important step in making healthy food choices.

The Parents Jury website (<http://www.parentsjury.org.au>) provides comprehensive information on food labelling with a range of resources available to download, which can be used by consumers to advocate for improvements to food labelling.

The Parents Jury also provide tips on how to improve children's understanding of food labels, including:

1. Using a nutrition guide (available on website) as a reference when shopping, to help interpret levels of fat, sugar and sodium in foods.
2. Labelling the foods in your pantry using the Parents Jury's Do It Yourself Food Label. This will allow you and your children to see the levels of fats, sugar and sodium at a glance.
3. Understanding serving sizes of occasional foods. Look at the recommended serving size on the Nutrition Information Panel of occasional foods. This serving size is often a lot smaller than typically eaten. Talk with your children about the importance of eating occasional foods in moderation.
4. Suggest label reading as a school lesson. This may include learning about food labels, ingredient lists, nutritional content, and serving sizes, and could be incorporated into many different school subjects.
5. Be sceptical about claims, such as 'low fat', on food packets. Do not base your food purchases solely on this information. These claims are a form of marketing, which highlight the product's nutritional benefits and may ignore their less healthy aspects. Refer to the nutrition information panel and ingredients list as well.

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Publisher: **The Cancer Council NSW**

ISSN: 1834 - 3767 CAN/06/12B

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