

Junk Food INJUNCTION

2007 SUMMER EDITION



Message from the Editors

Welcome to the first edition of our quarterly *Junk Food Injunction* newsletter.

Our aim is to keep you informed about food marketing to children and its impact on children's health. The Cancer Council NSW recognises that preventing weight gain in children will have huge health benefits that will extend well into adulthood. Restricting unhealthy food marketing to children is one of the many strategies needed to create a healthy environment and turn around the rising rates of childhood obesity.

Obesity is a significant risk factor for various cancers, including cancer of the breast, colon, endometrium and kidney.

For these reasons weight issues in childhood are a priority area for our organisation. We hope you enjoy receiving *Junk Food Injunction* and that it gives you the inspiration and the tools to say "NO" to unhealthy food marketing to children.

Childhood Obesity: Statistics and Significance

The number of overweight and obese children in Australia has doubled in the past two decades, and continues to climb at an unprecedented rate.

The most recent research by the NSW Department of Health, ie the NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS), which included school-aged children from Kindergarten to school Year 10 has shown that one in four children are overweight or obese. If the current rate of weight gain continues, it is predicted that half of all children will be overweight or obese by 2025.



of health problems including psychological issues such as depression, immediate physical and medical problems such as asthma and orthopaedic injuries, and long-term chronic disease risk including cancer.

The SPANS study also looked at early signs of chronic diseases in children in year 10; 20% had high blood levels of insulin, putting them at risk of diabetes and 10% had low levels of good cholesterol, putting them at risk of heart disease.

With up to 80% of overweight children becoming overweight adults, both the personal and financial costs of this disease are evident. Access Economics recently estimated the financial cost of obesity in Australia to be \$3.77 billion in the last financial year, with estimates blowing out to \$21 billion when financial value is given to loss of quality of life.

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The problems arising from this 'obesity epidemic' include a myriad

Fruitless: Government Protection Against Commercial Exploitation of Children

Children, particularly those less than eight years of age, are at high risk of commercial exploitation by food marketers. Younger children are unable to recognise that behind the themes of fun and fantasy, the intention of food marketing is to sell them a product. While older children may be able to understand the nature of food marketing they are still heavily influenced.



The Cancer Council NSW believes government legislation is necessary to protect children from junk food marketing. Unfortunately, in Australia, regulations fall short. Despite the growing evidence about the effects of food marketing on children's diets, the federal Government continues to refuse tighter control of food marketing activities.

Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, and Prime Minister, John Howard, maintain that it is parents' responsibility to ensure that their children choose healthy foods. Certainly parents have a major role to play in shaping their children's eating habits, however, when confronted with forceful marketing techniques, refusing unhealthy foods to children is difficult. Despite parents' best efforts, studies show that they will give in to children's "pester power" around 50% of the time.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) currently regulates TV food advertising to children. However, ACMA's Children's Television Standards have many loopholes and rely on the general public to complain about breaches to this code. Without your complaints, there is no TV advertising regulation. Professor Boyd Swinburn from Population Health, Deakin University, believes the food companies have a powerful influence on government, which prevents changes to policy or programs.

The Standards are due for review towards the end of 2006 and The Cancer Council NSW, as part of The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC), will be submitting recommendations for changes to these standards to better protect children. We will be working on an advocacy campaign to ensure our recommendations are heard, but we will need your help. The advocacy campaign will involve a petition to ACMA in the form of postcards; the more signed postcards that we have, the louder our voice will be. These postcards will be ready by the next edition of Junk Food Injunction in March 2007.

"The federal Government has been absolutely adamant that they will do nothing about the marketing of unhealthy junk foods to our young people. They usually start any meeting not with "Hello" but "Don't ask about regulating marketing, we're not going to do it".

Assoc. Professor Michael Booth, Director of the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity

What about other marketing?

Non-broadcast media marketing (other than TV) remains a relatively unregulated area that offers food companies easy and unrestricted access to children. Current Cancer Council NSW research into non-broadcast media marketing will help to develop knowledge in this field and assist in our advocacy for the protection of children from commercial messages from these other media.

What can you do?

For further information on the specifications of the Children's Television Standards code and guidelines on how to lodge a complaint against ads you think are in breach of this code refer to the Parents Jury web site. <http://www.parentsjury.org.au>

Square Eye for the Fat Guy

The old adage that watching too much TV will make your eyes square may be more truthfully described as making your body fat. The Government's *Physical Activity Recommendations for Children and Young People* specify children should spend less than two hours per day watching TV, playing computer games or using the Internet. However, in reality, three-quarters of boys and two-thirds of girls in school years 6, 8 and 10 are exceeding this recommendation.

TV's link with obesity is well documented. Viewing is associated with increased sedentary behaviour, increased snacking and exposure to junk food marketing.



Two recent international reviews have provided the most conclusive evidence so far to show the direct link between junk food advertising and children's weight. The reviews, published for the Food Standards Agency in the UK in 2003 and by the Institute of Medicine in the USA in 2006, showed that ads have an effect on children's food preferences, the food that they ask their parents/carers to purchase, and the food they ultimately eat.

In Australia, the levels of food advertising on TV are amongst the highest in the world. A recent study by The Cancer Council NSW found that food products dominate TV ads. Eighty one percent ads were for unhealthy foods, such as sugary breakfast cereals, confectionery and fast food restaurant meals. The high repetition of the ads normalise unhealthy foods, and undermine healthy eating advice from schools and parents.

Until now there has been very little research on the effect of other forms of food marketing to children, such as food marketing on the Internet and fundraising activities linked to junk food. However, when teamed with TV advertising, these other marketing avenues are likely to boost the negative impact on children's diets and food perceptions. The Cancer Council NSW is conducting research in this field and will update findings in later editions of *Junk Food Injunction*.

Big Bucks for Food Marketing

Top 10 food companies by marketing spend

1. Kellogg (Australia) \$36.9 million
2. Nestle Australia \$20.9 million
3. Master Foods Aus & NZ \$20.7 million
4. Uncle Toby's Co \$17.6 million
5. Cadbury Confectionery \$17.4 million
6. Unilever Foods \$15.1 million
7. Arnott's Biscuits \$14.6 million
8. McCain Foods (Australia) \$14.3 million
9. Simplot Australia \$13.7 million
10. Kraft Foods \$12.4 million

(AC Nielsen data, 2003)

These 10 companies spent more than \$380 million on marketing in a single year. Compare this expenditure with the Australian Government's pledge of \$116 million over four years for both physical activity and healthy eating promotion. That's only \$29 million per year!

MARKETING MANOEUVRES

Food marketing to children often uses multiple strategies to reinforce brand exposure and build children's loyalty. For example, a food brand may advertise on TV, sponsor children's sporting teams, be sold for school fundraisers and have a mobile phone ring tone.

The use of non-broadcast marketing techniques is likely to gain momentum as food marketers look for opportunities with fewer regulations and less scrutiny.

Watch out for these marketing strategies

Promotions: including premium offers, celebrity endorsements, the use of cartoon characters, health and nutrient claims and product placements.

Price: where products are sold at cheaper prices to make them more available and appealing to children.

Place: including school canteens, vending machines, sporting events and supermarkets, where children maybe captive audiences.

Packaging: by incorporating packaging that is appealing to children.

Product expansion: by selling multiple variations of a product, for example size and flavour variations.

Public relations: sponsoring TV programs, sporting events, fundraising initiatives and establishing or donating money to charity to appear philanthropic.

New technology: including the Internet and SMS/text messaging.

Print media ads: including in children's magazines.

In a Nutshell

- Children are exposed to high levels of junk food marketing on TV.
- Non-broadcast food marketing is likely to reinforce the impact of TV food advertising to children.
- Food marketing influences children's diets and ultimately impacts on their health and weight.
- Current Australian regulations for food marketing to children are inadequate and do not protect children from commercial messages.

Real Kids' Food: Healthy Recipes

Fruit Trifle

Ingredients

- 1 packet low-joule jelly (any flavour)
- 2 cups low-fat custard
- 1 small tub low-fat natural yoghurt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Fresh fruit such as kiwi fruit for decoration.

For fruit salad:

- 1 tin apricots, drained and chopped
- 1 fresh apple, cored and chopped
- 1 fresh pear, cored and chopped
- 1 banana, chopped

Method

Make jelly according to instructions. Cool.

As it begins to set, pour it over the fruit salad in a large serving bowl.

Allow to set in fridge.

Pour custard over jellied fruit mixture.

Mix vanilla with yoghurt and spread over custard.

Chill in fridge, and then decorate with sliced fruit.



What can you do?

TOP 10 TIPS FOR REDUCING YOUR CHILD'S EXPOSURE TO FOOD MARKETING

1. Lead by example, do not turn on the TV when you get home nor leave it on as background noise.
2. Limit your child's total small screen time (including TV, Internet and computer games) to less than two hours per day.
3. Keep TVs and computers out of children's bedrooms. Instead put them in a common area of the house where you can monitor what your child is watching or playing.
4. Switch off the TV during meal times. The distraction of the TV can cause your child to eat more food than they normally would.
5. Point out the tricks used by food marketers to sell their product, for example toy give-aways and competitions. Children, particularly younger children, will not recognise these tricks themselves.
6. For younger children, parents should select appropriate Internet sites for children to visit. These sites can be bookmarked for children to visit later (with adult supervision). Filters can be used to avoid unwanted Internet sites such as those for unhealthy food brands.
7. Ensure children understand that any personal information they give over the Internet may not be secure. This includes registering in "kid's sections" of food companies' web sites or competitions. Food companies will use this information to target your child for future marketing.
8. Encourage children to watch videos, DVDs or non-commercial television (ABC) rather than commercial channels or Pay TV (keeping within their limit of less than two hours per day). Alternatively tape your child's favourite shows so you can fast-forward through the ad breaks later. Finding the mute button during ads can be equally effective.
9. Develop rules for small screen activities. This may include no TV or Internet before school; all homework is to be completed before TV or computer games are switched on; TV turned off during meal times etc.
10. Read any children's magazines with your child and discuss any food marketing present, such as competitions and games, and explain its purpose.

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