

# JUNK FOOD INJUNCTION

2009 SUMMER EDITION



## Message from the Editors

Welcome to the first edition of *Junk Food Injunction* for 2009. We hope our readers and their families had a happy and healthy festive season.

This year brings the promise of renewed action on food marketing to children. Public submissions to the Preventative Health Taskforce discussion paper to reduce chronic disease, including obesity, closed on 2 January. This discussion paper included recommendations to reduce unhealthy food marketing to children. The Taskforce will be reporting back to the Health Minister in June this year, so we'll keep you informed of any progress in this area.

Also, the Australian Food and Grocery Council have kicked off their Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative, which aims to reduce unhealthy food marketing to children through industry self-regulation. We give you our account of this initiative in this edition of *Junk Food Injunction*. Also in this edition, we describe three new studies which highlight the impact that unhealthy food advertising bans would have on childhood obesity; the types of foods promoted to children at community sporting venues; and a food labelling system which would help shoppers to choose healthier food products. We also provide a recipe for a low-fat version of a party favourite – spring rolls. Enjoy.

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## Australian Food and Grocery Council Start the Year with a Bang or a Fizzle?

According to Wikipedia only 12 percent of people successfully achieve their New Years resolutions: a discouraging figure by any standard, and hopefully not prophetic of the resolution made by the food industry to cease promoting unhealthy food to children.

As of the first of January this year, the Australian Food and Grocery Council introduced their Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative, which provides a framework for food industry members to self-regulate the way they market their products to children. So far, eight companies have signed up to the initiative including Nestle, Cereal Partners Worldwide, Kraft, Cadbury, George Weston, Unilever, Coca Cola and PepsiCo, with each company developing an individual policy to guide their marketing practices under this broader initiative.

It is encouraging that the food industry is finally conceding that unhealthy food marketing to children is an important issue influencing children's health, and is taking action to restrict this marketing. However, we sincerely hope that this initiative is not merely lip service to evade government regulatory action, as some aspects of the signatory companies' policies may indicate.

On closer scrutiny, company policies contain some major limitations that are likely to limit the impact that this initiative will have on reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing. One such limitation is the lack of clear and independent guidelines to classify food products as unhealthy. Under the Cereal Partners Worldwide policy, an umbrella company which includes Nestle, only "healthy" products which comply with the company's own nutrition specifications can be advertised to children. In actuality these specifications are unlikely to restrict

many (if any) products from being promoted. Breakfast cereals which contain less than 12 grams of sugar per serve are permitted to be advertised; however even Nestle Milo cereal, containing 30 percent sugar would comply with these specifications, with nine grams of sugar per 30 gram serve.

Furthermore, in relation to television advertising, the timing of advertising restrictions are vague and misleading. The majority of company policies specify that unhealthy food advertisements will be restricted during broadcast periods "where the audience is predominantly children". However, television audience figures show that there are no broadcast periods where children less than 12 years make up the majority of the viewing audience. Effectively, these restrictions would not apply during any broadcast periods.

While the spirit of these policies seem promising, the actual details are disappointing. This initiative must not be seen as action enough - statutory regulation is still needed to ensure that the "good" intentions of the food industry carry through into actual change, and that restrictions apply across all food companies.

*"Self-regulation will work as well as self-regulation of plastic bags. The majority of the public wants action, but as so often happens in politics the lobbyists are much more effective than public opinion".*

Senator Bob Brown  
(December 2008)

## Yellow Card for Sports Clubs as Canteens Tout Junk Food

New research released by Cancer Council NSW and the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity at Sydney University, indicates that children are receiving mixed health messages at sporting venues; with healthy lifestyles being promoted through sports participation but unhealthy diets being provided at sports canteens.

The research which was recently published in the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* involved a random survey of over 400 parents across New South Wales, and asked parents about the food and beverages that were sold at their child's sporting venues, and the food items that their children typically purchased.<sup>1</sup> The results were not encouraging. The majority of canteens at both outdoor sports fields and community swimming pools were considered to sell mostly unhealthy food, with only four percent of outdoor sports fields and two percent of swimming pools thought to sell mostly healthy food items. While water was the most frequently purchased item at outdoor sports fields, almost 50 percent of parents reported that their child frequently purchased chocolate and confectionery, soft drinks and sports drinks, and ice cream at these venues. Ice cream and ice blocks were the single most purchased food items at swimming pools.

Until now state health departments have recognised the need to promote healthy food and beverages through canteens at other locations, including schools and health facilities, while canteens at sporting venues have been largely ignored. However, parents want to see government introduce regulations to restrict the types of food and beverages that can be sold at children's sporting venues. Almost two-thirds of all parents surveyed wanted to see government take action in this area.

In the meantime, promising action is being taken in some areas, with the Good For Kids, Good For Life childhood obesity prevention program operating in the Hunter New England area of New South Wales teaming up with Good Sports to improve the nutritional quality of canteens at sporting venues in this location. Under this program, sports clubs will be able to achieve accreditation by removing unhealthy foods from their canteens and offering healthier choices. Action is also being taken in other states, with Cancer Council WA offering assistance to popular children's venues to improve the nutritional quality of their menus. Under this scheme, 17 percent of venues (n = 3) made positive changes to their menus, such as the provision of more salads.



While these efforts represent opportunities for constructive developments in the foods provided to children at sporting venues, efforts are likely to be fragmented and protracted without government intervention. Cancer Council wants to see state governments heeding the call of parents and introduce restrictions on the types of food and beverages that can be sold at sporting venues.

1. Kelly B, Chapman K, King L, Hardy L, Farrell L. Double standards for community sports: promoting active lifestyles but unhealthy diets. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 2008; **19**(3): 226-228.

### What can you do?

The Parents Jury are currently running a campaign to advocate for healthier food and beverage options for children at sporting venues, restaurants, cafes, and at family entertainment venues: the Healthy Menus, Healthy Venues campaign. Visit <http://www.parentsjury.org.au> to learn more about this topic and what you can do to help advocate for change.

## Label wars: Traffic Lights vs. Percentage Daily Intake

With the huge number of packaged food and beverages available in supermarkets, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make healthy food choices. Nutrition information panels, which under current Australian food labelling laws must be displayed on the back or sides of all food packages, together with nutrition claims (e.g. “99% fat free”) and endorsement programs, all make the job of choosing healthy foods an ever more bewildering task.

Meanwhile, the need to select healthier foods is more important than ever, as Australians are getting fatter, and are at increased risk of developing diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

An easier to understand, and immediately visible food labelling system is needed to quickly and accurately help shoppers to select healthier foods. The food industry, in the absence of government action, has introduced a front-of-pack food labelling system called Percentage Daily Intake. This labelling shows the contribution that a serve of a food makes to an “average” person’s daily nutrient requirements. One major drawback of this scheme is that these nutrient requirements are based on that of a 70kg adult; a profile that not many people conform to.

The introduction of this scheme comes despite international research which indicates that this system performs poorly compared to Traffic Light labelling, which uses coloured dots to indicate if a food product has a high (red), moderate (amber) or low (green) level of fat, saturated fat, sugar and sodium. Industry’s preference for Percentage Daily Intake labelling is not surprising, with red dots likely to discourage some consumers from purchasing unhealthy products.

Cancer Council, in collaboration with researchers at Choice, Obesity Policy Coalition, Institute of Obesity, Nutrition and Exercise, University of Sydney and the Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia put nearly 800 grocery shoppers to the test to see how well they could use a range of different front-of-pack food labelling systems, including variations of the Percentage Daily Intake system and the Traffic Light system.



Overall, the Traffic Light system was the most effective. Those shoppers who compared products using the Traffic Light system were five times more likely to correctly identify the healthier food products, compared to those using the Percentage Daily Intake system. Importantly, shoppers could use the Traffic Light system irrespective of their education and income levels, unlike the Percentage Daily Intake system, which performed poorly among those shoppers who were in the lowest socio-economic groups.

This research clearly indicates that Traffic Light labelling is the most effective front-of-pack food labelling system, as it allows Australians to quickly and easily make healthier food choices when grocery shopping. Cancer Council is calling on government to introduce Traffic Light labelling on all packaged food products in Australia to assist grocery shoppers to select healthier food products for themselves and their families.

To read more about this study visit <http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/nutrition/foodlabellingreport>.

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## Government Stalls as Childhood Obesity Rises

The Australian Communications and Media Authority, to justify their inaction in restricting unhealthy television food advertising to children, state that the association between food advertising and obesity is quite modest. However, new research published in the *Journal of Law and Economics* strongly refutes this claim, suggesting that banning unhealthy television food advertising to children could reduce child obesity rates by up to 18 percent.

Using child survey data from the past three decades, researchers in the United States have developed a mathematical model to predict the reduction in childhood obesity from the introduction of regulations to ban television fast food restaurant advertisements. If this result were applied to the Australian population, more than 150,000 children aged 0 to 11 years could be spared from overweight and obesity by this simple policy change.

## Real Kids' Food: Healthy Recipes

### Baked Spring Rolls

Makes 20



#### Ingredients:

70g dried rice vermicelli noodles  
1 tsp peanut oil  
55g (1/2 cup) finely chopped green cabbage  
2 carrots, peeled, coarsely grated  
1 celery stick, finely chopped  
2 shallots, thinly sliced  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
1 tsp finely grated fresh ginger  
2 tsp reduced salt soy sauce  
100g firm tofu, thinly sliced  
1 x 300g pkt frozen spring roll wrappers, thawed  
Olive oil spray  
Sweet chilli sauce, to serve

#### Method:

1. Preheat oven to 200°C. Line 2 baking trays with non-stick baking paper. Place noodles in a bowl and cover with boiling water. Set aside for 5 minutes. Rinse under cold running water. Drain. Cut into short lengths.
2. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Add cabbage, carrot, celery and shallot. Cook for 3 minutes. Add garlic and ginger and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Stir in the soy sauce.
3. Transfer vegetable mixture to a large bowl. Stir in the noodles and tofu. Set aside for 10 minutes to cool.
4. Place 1 spring roll wrapper on a clean work surface. Place 1 tablespoon of the mixture diagonally along the centre. Brush edges with water. Fold in the ends. Roll up firmly to enclose filling. Repeat with remaining wrappers and filling.
5. Place on the lined trays. Spray with olive oil spray. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until golden. Set aside to cool slightly. Serve with sweet chilli sauce.

Source: Australian Good Taste - April 2008, Page 58

## Top Marketing Tactics Targeting Parents

A new report published by the British Heart Foundation exposes food marketers' tactics to attract parents to unhealthy food products aimed at the child market. To date, the debate about unhealthy food marketing has focused solely on child-oriented marketing, with very little research on marketing to parents – who have primary responsibility for providing a healthy diet for their children.

The report, which identified marketing techniques across a range of both broadcast and non-broadcast media including magazines, the Internet and product packaging, shows that a range of sophisticated marketing techniques are used to manipulate parents into thinking they are buying healthy food for their children.

The major marketing techniques used to target parents were found to be:

1. Nutrition claims: E.g. The Natural Confectionery Company claim their confectionery contains “no artificial flavourings or colourings”
2. Health claims: E.g. Cheesestringers are claimed to be good “for healthy teeth and bones”
3. Quality claims: E.g. Nutella claims to be “part of a balanced breakfast”
4. Images: E.g. Television advertisements for Kellogg's Rice Crispies are depicted with healthy, happy children smiling at and laughing with their mother in a clean and well ordered kitchen
5. Promotion: E.g. Burger King attempts to lure parents with the promise of price savings, with a “free kid's meal upon purchase of an adult meal”
6. Emotional insight: E.g. Kellogg's hone in on parents' concerns about uneaten food at school saying their Coco Pops muesli bars are a “great tasting snack that you can be sure won't come back from school in the lunchbox”
7. Endorsement: E.g. A British athlete is pictured on the packaging of Nestle Nesquik cereal boxes

To access the full report go to [http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view\\_publication.aspx?ps=1000664](http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view_publication.aspx?ps=1000664) .

#### In a nutshell

- The food industry's Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative promises to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing. However, food company policies contain many major limitations indicating that the initiative may not deliver on its promises.
- Children are receiving contradictory messages at sporting venues, with the sale of unhealthy foods at sports canteens. Regulation is needed to restrict the types of foods that can be sold at these venues.
- Traffic Light labelling is the most effective front-of-pack food labelling system, which allows shoppers to quickly and easily make healthier food choices.
- American research predicts fast food television advertising bans could result in an 18 percent reduction in childhood obesity.