



Research report

Association between food marketing exposure and adolescents' food choices and eating behaviors [☆]

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined associations between food marketing exposure and adolescents' food choices and reported consumption of energy-dense and nutrient-poor (EDNP) foods. A cross-sectional survey of 12,188 Australian secondary students aged 12–17 years was conducted, using a web-based self-report questionnaire. Measures included students' level of exposure to commercial television and non-broadcast types of food marketing, whether they had tried a new product or requested a product they had seen advertised, and their reported consumption of fast food, sugary drinks and sweet and salty snacks. Results indicated greater exposure to commercial television, print/transport/school food marketing and digital food marketing were all independently associated with students' food choices. High commercial television viewers (>2 h/day) were more likely to report higher consumption of EDNP foods (ORs ranged from 1.31 for fast food to 1.91 for sweet snacks). Some associations between digital food marketing exposure and students' eating behaviors were found; however, print/transport/school food marketing was only related to sweet snack consumption. These study results suggest that cumulative exposure to television food advertising and other food marketing sources are positively linked to adolescents' food choices and eating behaviors. Policy changes to restrict food marketing to young people should include both television and non-broadcast media.

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Introduction

Food marketing has been identified as an important target for intervention in the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity (World Health Organization, 2006). There is strong and consistent evidence from systematic reviews that food marketing influences children's food preferences, purchases and consumption (Cairns, Angus, & Hastings, 2009; Institute of Medicine, 2006;

Livingstone & Helsper, 2004). Globally, there is a nutritional imbalance in the types of foods that are promoted to children. A recent study comparing television food advertising patterns in 13 countries across five continents found that the majority of advertised foods were non-core foods that are energy-dense and nutrient-poor (EDNP), and that the rate of EDNP food advertising was higher during children's peak viewing times (Kelly et al., 2010). Television viewing has been shown to be positively associated with children's energy intake and consumption of foods most frequently advertised (Utter, Scragg, & Schaaf, 2006; Wiecha et al., 2006).

Exposure to food marketing extends beyond broadcast media with food companies increasingly using integrated marketing campaigns to reach young people through multiple channels that complement and reinforce their promotional messages (Cairns et al., 2009). For example, a UK study found that almost half of food advertisements in magazines for children and adolescents directed readers to a related food marketing website (Cowburn & Boxer, 2007). Research indicates that young people are exposed to considerable levels of unhealthy food advertising through the

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