



Food Marketing and Advertising to Children

The American Heart Association's Position

The American Heart Association (AHA) sees no ethical, political, scientific, or social justification for marketing and advertising low-nutrient, high-calorie foods to children and supports efforts to diminish this practice in the United States. Specifically, the AHA recommends:

- Congress restore the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission to their full capacity to regulate marketing to children. At minimum, as the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative continues over the short term, the goal should be to strengthen enforcement as much as possible to minimize non-compliance and establish uniform nutrition standards for foods that can be marketed and advertised to children.
- Only healthy foods should be advertised and marketed to children (these foods would include fruit, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole grain). Implicit in this is that foods that are advertised meet criteria that the AHA has set for nutrients that affect cardiovascular disease risk (i.e., added sugars, saturated fat, cholesterol, and fiber). Additionally, advertising of healthy foods to children should include positive messages about physical activity.
- Product placement of food brands should be discouraged in the multiple media technologies—including movies, videogames, advergames, social media, cell phones, podcasts, and television programming—geared to children.
- Toy companies and the movie industry should not be able to partner with fast food companies to market unhealthy meals to children.
- Licensed characters should only be used to market healthy foods to children.
- Advertising, marketing, and brand awareness strategies used by industry should not be allowed in schools or on educational materials.
- Nutrition standards should be established for restaurant children's meals and the default options that come with restaurant children's meals should be healthy.

Fast Facts:

1. Research shows that marketing and advertising of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods increases children's preference and intake of unhealthy foods and beverages.¹
2. Unhealthy food marketing aimed at children and teens is a significant contributor to poor diet quality and diet-related diseases worldwide.²
3. In 2016, children viewed TV ads that primarily promoted unhealthy products—including fast food, candy, sweet and salty snacks, and sugary drinks—less than 10% of food ads promoted healthier products.³
4. A report from the Federal Trade Commission revealed that industry spent nearly \$1.8 billion in 2009 marketing and advertising foods and beverages to children—the top three sources were fast food, carbonated beverages, and breakfast cereals.⁴
5. A 2019 report found that despite overall food and beverage advertising declining, black-targeted food and beverage advertising increased more than 50% from 2013 to 2017.⁵
6. 8 out of 10 of the food and beverage ads seen by Hispanic children on Spanish-language television promote fast food, candy, sugary drinks, and snacks.⁵

Progress to Date

Through the support of Voices for Healthy Kids, a joint initiative of the American Heart Association and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Stockton, Perris, Santa Clara County, Daly City, Cathedral City, and Long Beach, CA, California, Lafayette, CO, and Baltimore, MD have all passed policies to make the automatic beverage offered with a restaurant kids' meal healthier and Nevada, California, Rhode Island, and Chesterfield County, VA have all passed policies to limit junk food marketing in schools.

For more information and resources from the American Heart Association's policy research department or nutrition policy positions please visit: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/policy-research>.

¹ Sadeghirad B, Duhaney T, Motaghipishah S, Campbell NRC, Johnston BC. Influence of unhealthy food and beverage marketing on children's dietary intake and preference: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized trials. *Obesity Reviews* 2016;17(10):945-959. doi:10.1111/obr.12445.

² World Health Organization (WHO). A framework for implementing the set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/MarketingFramework2012.pdf>. Accessed February 2019.

³ The Rudd Center. Food industry self-regulation after 10 years: progress and opportunities to improve food advertising to children. 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/facts2017>. Accessed February 2019.

⁴ Federal Trade Commission. A review of food marketing to children and adolescents: A review of industry expenditures, activities, and self-regulation. *Washington, DC: Federal Trade Commission*. 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/marketing-food-children-and-adolescents-review-industry-expenditures-activities-and-self-regulation/p064504foodmktngreport.pdf>. Accessed February 2019.

⁵ The Rudd Center. Increasing disparities in unhealthy food advertising targeted to black and Hispanic youth. 2018. Retrieved from: <http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/TargetedMarketingReport2019.pdf>. Accessed February 2019.