

Nutrition Australia

Position Statement:

Food Advertising directed at Children.

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Nutrition Australia asserts that the food intake of children is an important contributor to their present and future health. Childhood obesity has been rapidly increasing (1,2) with up to 25% of Australian children being overweight or obese. Although some recent research has indicated the rate of increase in childhood overweight and obesity in Australia may now be slowing (3), the implications for the future health of the young Australians who are overweight or obese are very concerning. Already, one identified major negative outcome is the rising rate of diabetes in childhood, and obesity and diabetes in adult life (4).

Food preferences of children are an important determinant of what they eat (5). The food preferences of children are heavily influenced by parents, carers, peer pressure and the media (5, 6). Nutrition Australia believes that all of these areas should be targeted to improve dietary intake in childhood and adolescence. Media advertisement is an area where government and/or industry regulation is accepted practice and advertising foods to children an important area currently poorly regulated.

Approximately 30% of non program content during children's television viewing hours in Australia and New Zealand is for food (7, 8). The majority of this food is of questionable nutritional value, a result found in many countries (7, 8, 9, 10, 11). Such advertising is directed at influencing the food preferences of children, and it has been shown to be effective at doing so (12, 11). The consistency of food messages provided through television advertising with current dietary recommendations is poor (8, 9). Children need to be protected from commercial influences, particularly those that have the potential to adversely impact on their present or

future health.

Children in the United States who view television as a normal part of their meal routine have poorer dietary habits than those who do not (14). For these children who view television regularly at mealtimes, by the time they leave high school, the hours spent watching television will have exceeded the hours spent in school (9).

As an organised society we accept a societal responsibility for the future health of our children. Therefore, we should ensure the existence of social structures that actively support and promote healthy food choices for children. Nutrition Australia notes that there are precedents for a total ban of TV advertising directed at children (eg Sweden, and the Canadian province of Quebec).

Nutrition Australia believe that all television advertising of food during children's viewing hours (early morning, post school and early evening) should meet minimum standards. These standards should include a restriction on the number of minutes of food advertising allowed per hour, prohibition of any false or misleading messages that a child could reasonably be expected to draw from advertising, and the appropriate placement of advertised food in the context of the whole diet. Guidelines for advertisers should include the requirement that advertised foods are consistent with the intent of the Australian Dietary Guidelines, and the 'eat most' segment of the Healthy Living Pyramid, and that these healthy eating principles are promoted as part of the advertisement.

In the circumstances where appropriate television advertising guidelines and standards are not developed and followed, Nutrition Australia consider that a prohibition on television advertising of food during children's viewing hours is a better alternative to the current situation where television food advertising is inconsistent with the development of healthy eating habits.

Community action is urgently needed to ensure that the advertising of food to children on television is appropriately regulated.

What you can do:

Become a member of the Parents Jury which is a community advocacy group that highlights topical issues for parents and is strong advocacy group in relation to a healthy food supply

and advertising food to children. Refer to the Parents Jury website at:

<http://www.parentsjury.org.au/>

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