

# Pestering Parents:

How Food Companies Market Obesity to Children



**Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)**

\$10 USA/ \$15 CAN.

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## **CSPI and the Nutrition Policy Project**

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. Since 1971, CSPI has been working to improve the public's health through its work on nutrition, food safety and alcohol issues. CSPI is supported primarily by the 800,000 subscribers to its *Nutrition Action Healthletter* and philanthropic foundations.

CSPI's Nutrition Policy Project is working with concerned citizens, health professionals, government officials and other nonprofit organizations to strengthen national, state and local policies and programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Our goal is to help reduce the illnesses, disabilities and deaths caused by diet- and inactivity-related diseases and conditions such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. For more information on our current projects and other policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity visit <[www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy](http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy)>.

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**For more information, model policies and other materials contact:**

Dr. Margo G. Wootan  
Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)  
Phone: 202-777-8352  
Fax: 202-265-4954  
Email: [nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org](mailto:nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org)

*Pestering Parents* is available on line (free of charge) at <[www.cspinet.org/pesteringparents](http://www.cspinet.org/pesteringparents)> or by mailing a check for \$10 to CSPI-Pestering Parents, 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20009.

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## Summary

*Pestering Parents* outlines the importance of good nutrition to children's health, children's exposure to food marketing, the types of venues and techniques used to market food to children, the effect of that marketing on children's food choices, current regulation of food marketing aimed at children, and actions that have been taken in other countries and for other health behaviors. This report also offers recommendations for parents, industry, schools and governments to help reduce the marketing of low-nutrition foods to children.

A healthy diet is crucial to preventing obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other diseases. Those **chronic diseases/conditions often take decades to develop and have their roots in childhood, when disease processes begin and eating habits are formed.** Yet few children are eating in accordance with dietary guidelines, and the rates of childhood obesity and diabetes are rising rapidly. Parents bear most of the responsibility for feeding their children well. However, society should support parent's efforts by protecting children from practices that can harm their health.

Children's food choices are affected by many factors. One of the most important is that food companies have developed an enormous number of high-calorie foods and then relentlessly bombard children with messages to eat them. **Food marketing aimed at children has increased dramatically over the last two decades. It now reaches children almost everywhere**

**they are throughout the day** – through television, magazines, websites, product placement in movies, new products, product packaging, in-store displays, books, clothing and even in school, as well as ubiquitous fast-food restaurants and vending machines.

**Food manufacturers and chain restaurants use aggressive and sophisticated marketing techniques to attract children's attention, manipulate their food choices, and prompt them to pester their parents to purchase products.** Harry Potter, SpongeBob Squarepants, Winnie the Pooh, Elmo, games, contests, prizes and sports stars are enlisted to entice children to request low-nutrition foods.

Companies use advertising and other marketing techniques to sell more product and increase profits. While they are not intentionally trying to undermine children's health, there is **no disputing that the goal of food marketing aimed at children is to influence their food choices.**

Many children, especially young children, lack the cognitive skills and maturity to understand advertising, or to understand that advertisers are trying to sell them something or may exaggerate claims. **Studies demonstrate that advertising influences children's food preferences and choices and what they pester their parents to purchase.** Persistent nagging of parents and the need for parents to repeatedly say "no" can strain the parent-child relationship. **Conflicts arise** because the foods that are most heavily marketed to children are low-nutrition foods of which parents would

like their children to eat less. **Marketers count on children wearing their parents down and on parents giving in** and purchasing low-nutrition foods for their children.

Public policy has been used to protect children from products or behaviors that could harm them, even when such policies might negatively affect businesses. Tobacco advertising is banned from television and radio, some steps have been taken to restrict other marketing for cigarettes to venues where children are less likely to be exposed, and the sale of alcohol to people under 21 is illegal.

Since as far back as 1952, television broadcasters, in their *Television Code*, recognized that “television broadcasters should exercise the utmost care and discrimination with regard to advertising material, including content, placement and presentation, near or adjacent to programs designed for children” (National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters, 1952). That tradition is supposed to be continued through the industry-sponsored Children’s Advertising Review Unit’s (CARU) self-regulatory system. However, **from the examples outlined in this report, it is clear that many food companies and marketers are not advertising and marketing products to children responsibly and that the current regulatory system is inadequate.**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were efforts (which ultimately failed) to reduce junk-food advertising aimed at children. Given the rising obesity and diabetes rates and children’s poor

eating habits, it is time to revisit current practices and strengthen laws and regulations to better protect children’s health and support parents’ efforts to feed their children healthy diets.

Some argue that although companies market their products directly to children, it is up to parents to decide whether to purchase products. However, **food marketing aimed at children makes a parent’s job harder** and undermines parental authority. It forces parents to choose between being the bad guy who says “no” in order to protect their children’s health or giving in to junk-food demands to keep the peace. **It is time that food manufacturers and restaurants stopped pestering parents.**

**Recommendations:** Actions are needed by governments, schools, industry, parents, health professionals and others. They include **restricting the marketing to children of high-calorie, low-nutrition foods** on television, in magazines, schools and other child-directed venues. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state health departments should be funded to **sponsor aggressive media-based campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity to balance the pressures to eat low-nutrition foods.** Parents, health professionals and other community members should **urge broadcasters, food companies and restaurants to voluntarily adhere to guidelines for responsible food marketing aimed at children.**

## Introduction: A Nagging Problem

“Mom, can I have this?’ That endlessly repeated, whining plea from a child can quickly make a parent’s trip to the supermarket a real pain in the neck. But it’s music to a product marketer’s ears” (Food Processing, 1997).

Second, children influence another \$500 billion in spending by their families and others (McNeal, 1998). In addition, over half of teenage girls shop for all or part of their families’ groceries (Kraak & Pelletier, 1998b). Third, a key goal of marketing aimed at children is to shape food preferences and cultivate brand loyalty that will affect their future purchases.

### Purchases by Children (4 to 12 Years)\*

Category	Spending (billions \$)	Percent
Foods & Beverages	\$7.7	33%
Toys	\$6.5	28%
Clothing	\$3.6	15%
Movies/Sports	\$2.0	8%
Video Arcades	\$1.3	6%
Other	\$2.3	10%

\*McNeal, 1998

Foods high in calories, saturated and trans fat, and salt and low in nutrients are aggressively marketed to children. The time has come to reexamine current food advertising and marketing practices aimed at children because:

✓ Diet is a major cause of early death, disability and high health-care costs from heart disease, diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and other serious medical conditions.

Marketing aimed at children is big business since children possess and have influence over a considerable amount of money (McNeal, 1998). First, there is the money that children have in their own pockets, an amount that has been increasing. Children’s spending power doubled each decade of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and tripled in the 1990s. Children four to twelve years old spend and directly control at least \$24 billion a year in purchases. One-third of their money is spent on foods and beverages.

✓ Children’s diets are poor. They are too high in calories, saturated fat, refined sugar and salt and too low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and calcium.

✓ Rates of obesity, and with it type 2 diabetes, in children are rising rapidly.

Parents are primarily responsible for feeding children. However, food advertising and marketing make parents’ efforts to feed their children a healthy diet more difficult. In addition, parental authority is often bypassed via direct marketing to children through television, magazines and movies and at supermarkets and schools.

“The diet presented on Saturday morning television is the antithesis of what is recommended for healthful eating for children,” according to Kotz and Story (1994).

Institutions to which parents entrust their children, such as schools, also share in the responsibility of feeding children. Efforts by schools to serve healthier foods are affected by food marketing: serving hamburgers, french fries, chips, pizza and other heavily-marketed, low-nutrition foods is a sure-fire way to get students to eat at school.

Most children lack the skills and maturity to properly consider the long-term consequences of their actions. As a society, we have numerous laws and regulations designed to protect children, ranging from mandatory school attendance to restrictions on how much they can work and when they can drive, get married and enter into contracts.

Prohibitions against cigarette and alcohol use by minors and laws mandating safety seats in cars and head protection while riding bikes are examples of regulations that safeguard against children’s inability to make good decisions regarding long- and short-term health risks.

**It is incumbent upon society to foster healthy eating habits and to protect children from the influence of those who stand to profit from increasing their consumption of fatty, sugary, salty, high-calorie or low-nutrition foods.** This report, *Pestering Parents*, examines the influence of food marketing on children’s food choices and health.

“The industry says parents need to decide what’s appropriate, but then they go about using every marketing ploy they can to make it harder for parents to assert their authority,” said Dianne Levin, professor of education, Wheelock College (Consumers Union, 1998b).



## Children, Nutrition and Health

### “Adult” Diseases in Children

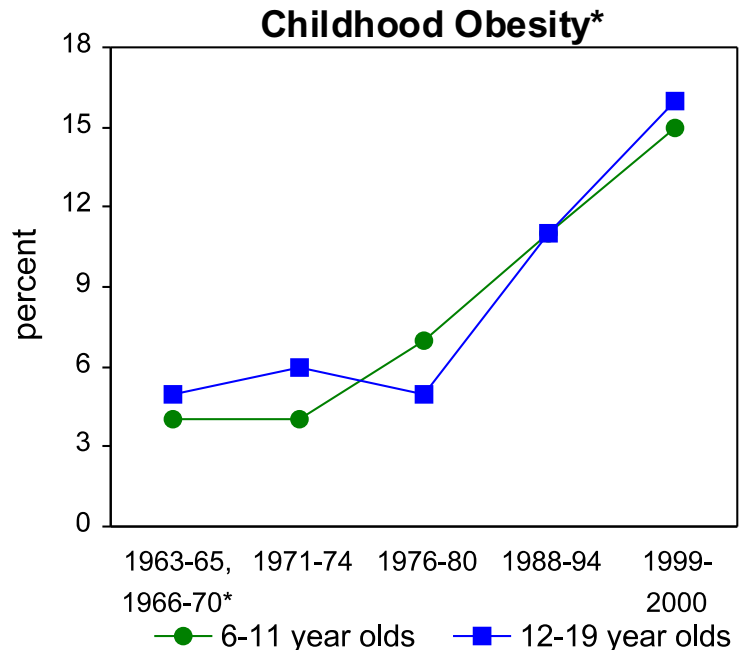
According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, poor diet and physical inactivity are leading causes of premature death, killing about 1,200 people each day – as many as tobacco (McGinnis & Foege, 1993). Diets high in calories, saturated and trans fat, sodium and added sugars and low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and calcium contribute significantly to the leading causes of death and high health-care costs: heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and osteoporosis.

In addition, poor diet can result in disabilities and loss of independence from stroke, heart disease or osteoporosis-related hip fracture or blindness and limb amputations due to diabetes.

Although those diseases are generally “adult” diseases, they have their roots in childhood, when eating habits are formed and disease processes begin. One-quarter of children ages 5 to 10 years old have high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels or other early warning sign for heart disease (Freedman et al., 1999). Autopsy studies of 15 to 19 year olds found that all had fatty streaks (the first step towards clogged arteries) in more than one artery, and about 10% had advanced fibrous plaques (PDAY, 1993).

Childhood Obesity. Obesity is one of the most pressing health problems facing the country. While the rates were relatively stable in the 1960s and 1970s, at around 5% for both children and adolescents, they increased rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s (see graph) (Ogden et al., 2002). In the last two decades, obesity rates doubled in children and tripled in adolescents.

The negative health consequences of obesity are already evident in children. Sixty percent of overweight children suffer from high blood pressure, high



blood cholesterol levels and/or high levels of insulin in the blood (a precursor to diabetes) (Freedman et al., 1999). Type 2 diabetes can no longer be called “adult onset” diabetes because of rising rates in children. In a study conducted in Cincinnati, the rate of new cases of type 2 diabetes in adolescents

increased 10-fold between 1982 and 1994 (Pinhas-Hamiel et al., 1996).

Diabetes can lead to other life-long health complications, such as heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, limb amputations and blindness, as well as pregnancy complications and increased deaths from flu and pneumonia (CDC, 2002). Each year, diabetes causes blindness in 12,000 to 24,000 people, kidney failure in 38,000, and leg and foot amputations in 82,000 people (CDC, 2002). As the number of young people with type 2 diabetes increases, diabetic complications will develop at younger ages (likely in their 30s to 40s). Childhood obesity and diabetes can be prevented through good dietary and physical activity habits.

Obese children are twice as likely as non-obese children to become obese adults (Serdula et al., 1993) and thus, are more likely to suffer from the health complications associated with adult obesity and overweight, which include diabetes, heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, stroke and psychological disorders such as depression (NIDDK, 2002; USDHHS, 2001).

Costs of Poor Diet and Obesity. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), healthier diets could save the country at least \$71 billion per year in medical costs, lost productivity and lost lives (Frazao, 1999). Overall, obesity costs American families, businesses and governments about \$117 billion in health-care and related costs each year (USDHHS, 2001). From 1979 to 1999, annual hospital costs for treating obesity-related

diseases in children rose three-fold, from \$35 million to \$127 million (Wang & Dietz, 2002).

## **Children's Diets**

### Poor Eating Habits Start Young.

The last thing children need is more encouragement – through food marketing – to eat calorie-dense, low-nutrition foods. Only 2% of children eat a healthy diet consistent with the Food Guide Pyramid (Munoz et al., 1997). Children's diets generally are too high in fat, saturated fat and sodium and too low in fiber (Lin et al., 1996).

Children's saturated fat intake was unchanged between 1989 and 1996. The number of grams of saturated fat consumed stayed constant at about 28 to 29 grams. While the percentage of calories consumed from saturated fat decreased from 13.0% to 11.7% (recommended intake is 10%), that is due to increased calorie intake. Only 16% of children meet the dietary recommendation for saturated fat intake (USDA, 2001a).

Children Are Eating More Calories. Between 1989 and 1996, children's calorie intake increased by approximately 80 to 230 extra calories per day (depending on the child's age and activity level) (USDA, 2001a; IOM, 2002). The increases in calorie intake were driven, in part, by increased intakes of foods and beverages high in added sugars (USDA, 2001a).

Children Are Snacking More. The average number of snacks eaten per day by teens increased from 1.6 to 2.0 between 1977 and 1996. Snacks

provide approximately 610 calories to teens' diets each day, up from 460 calories in 1977 (Jahns, 2001). Snacking would not be a problem if the snacks were healthful, but too often they are not.

Soft Drinks Contribute to Children's Rising Calorie Intake and Displace Healthy Foods. Nationally, carbonated soda consumption doubled over the last 30 years, from 24 to 55 gallons of soft drinks per person per year between 1970 and 2001 (Prince, 2002; Putnam and Allshouse, 1999). Soft drink consumption by children increased 40% between 1989 and 1996, from 1.0 to 1.4 servings per day (USDA, 2001a). 56% to 85% of children drink soda each day (depending on age and gender) (USDA, 2001b).

Children who drink soft drinks consume more calories (about 55 to 245 per day) than kids who do not drink soft drinks (Mrdjenovic & Levitsky, 2003; Harnack et al., 1999; Guenther, 1986) and are more likely to gain weight or become overweight (Mrdjenovic & Levitsky, 2003; Ludwig et al., 2001).

Consumption of **soft drinks can displace healthy foods** like low-fat milk and 100% juice from children's diets (Mrdjenovic & Levitsky, 2003; Cullen et al., 2002; Ballew et al., 2000; Bowman, 1999; Harnack et al., 1999; Lewis et al., 1992; Guenther, 1986). Only 30% of children consume the recommended number of servings of milk each day, down from 40% in 1989 (USDA, 2001a). About 15% eat the recommended amount of fruit.

Milk is an important source of calcium to help children build strong bones. Maximum bone mass for women is acquired by age 20 (NOF, 2001). Building strong bones in childhood and adolescence is essential to preventing osteoporosis later in life. In addition, people who eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day have half the cancer risk of those who eat fewer than two servings per day (Block et al., 1992).

Eating Out Negatively Affects Children's Diets. Restaurant foods are an increasingly important part of children's diets. In 1970, Americans spent just 26% of their food dollars on restaurant meals and other meals prepared outside their homes (Lin et al., 1999). Today, we spend almost half (46%) our food dollars at restaurants and other food-service establishments (NRA, 2002). Children eat about a third (32%) of their total calorie intake from away-from-home foods (Lin et al., 2001). The proportion of meals children ate out that were purchased in fast-food restaurants increased from 1 in 10 meals in 1977 to 1 in 3 meals in 1996 (Lin et al., 2001).

Children typically eat almost twice as many calories when they eat at a restaurant (770 calories) compared to a meal at home (420 calories) (Zoumas-Morse et al., 2001). In addition, the foods that children eat from fast-food and other restaurants are higher in fat and saturated fat and lower in fiber, iron, calcium and cholesterol than foods from home (Lin et al., 1996).

## Children's Exposure to Food Advertising and Other Marketing

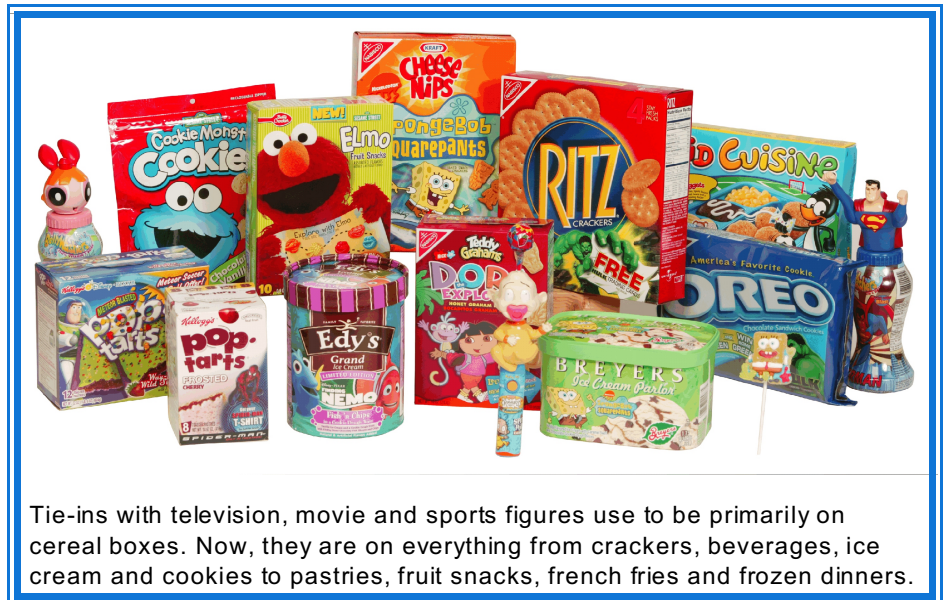
### Amount of Advertising

Food (i.e., food, beverages, sweets and restaurants) ranks as the third-most-advertised category of products in the U.S. (*Advertising Age*, 2002). Only cars and retail/department/discount stores are advertised more. According to USDA, food is heavily advertised because 1) the food sector is large (equal to about 12% of consumer income), 2) food is a repeat-purchase item and 3) food is highly branded. Thus, there is great potential to influence consumer decisions and tremendous competition between companies (Gallo, 1999).

**Food advertising and promotional expenditures were \$26 billion in 2000 (Elitzak, 2001). That is a 50% increase above what was spent in 1990.** Fifty percent of food advertising and promotions is by manufacturers, 25% by food service and 15% by retailers.

In 1980, when companies realized that children's disposable income and influence on family spending was on the rise, marketing to children began to mushroom. Television advertising aimed at children increased 10-fold between 1983 and 1997, from \$100 million to \$1 billion (Lauro, 1999).

### Overall marketing and advertising



**aimed at children increased from \$6.9 billion in 1992 to \$12.7 billion in 1997 to \$15 billion in 2002 (McNeal, 2003; Lauro, 1999; McNeal, 1992).** Marketing figures include television and print advertising, in-school marketing, sales promotions, public relations, packaging design and product placements in movies (for all marketing aimed at children, not just food).

### Media Exposure

The average American child (2 to 18 years old) spends about five-and-a-half hours using media per day (Kaiser, 1999). Television is, by far, the dominant medium, with the average child watching 2 hours and 46 minutes per day (see table on page 9). Even infants watch television in the U.S.: 17% of babies less than one year old and 48% of those between one and two years old watch one or more hours of television per day (Certain & Kahn,

### Average Television Viewing Time by Children Per Day\*

**By age:**

2-4 yr	1 hour, 59 min.
5-7 yr	2 hours
8-13 yr	3 hours, 37 min.
14-18 yr	2 hours, 43 min.

**By race (2-18 years):**

White	2 hours, 22 min.
Black	3 hours, 56 min.
Hispanic	3 hours, 31 min.

\*Kaiser, 1999

2002). Virtually all children live in homes with a television (99%), 74% have cable or satellite TV, 69% have a computer and 45% have Internet access (Kaiser, 1999). There are three televisions, three radios, two VCRs and one computer in the home of the average American child. The television is on “most of the time” in 42% of children’s homes, and is on during meals in 58% of children’s homes. Half (53%) of children have a television in their bedroom. In addition, many young children have televisions: one third (32%) of 2- to 7-year-olds have a television in their bedroom.

The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages television viewing for children under 2 years and recommends no more than 1 to 2 hours a day of total media (television, video games and other entertainment media) time for other children (AAP, 2001). Increasing the number of children who watch television two or fewer hours per school day is also a national health

goal of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2000).

Children see about 21 commercials on television per hour, and most commercials are about 30 seconds long (Taras & Gage, 1995). Thus, **children view an average of 3½ hours of television commercials per week, and each year they spend the equivalent of a week watching TV ads.**

### Food Advertising

A substantial proportion of television commercials aimed at children is for food. Studies of weekday afternoon and Saturday morning programs found that **half of all ads during children’s television shows are for food** (Gamble & Cotugna, 1999; Consumers International, 1996; Taras & Gage, 1995; Kotz & Story, 1994). A study of prime-time television shows viewed heavily by 2- to 11-year-olds found that a quarter of the advertisements are for foods and beverages (Byrd-Bredbenner & Grasso, 2000).

### Advertising Expenditures by Food Manufacturers\*

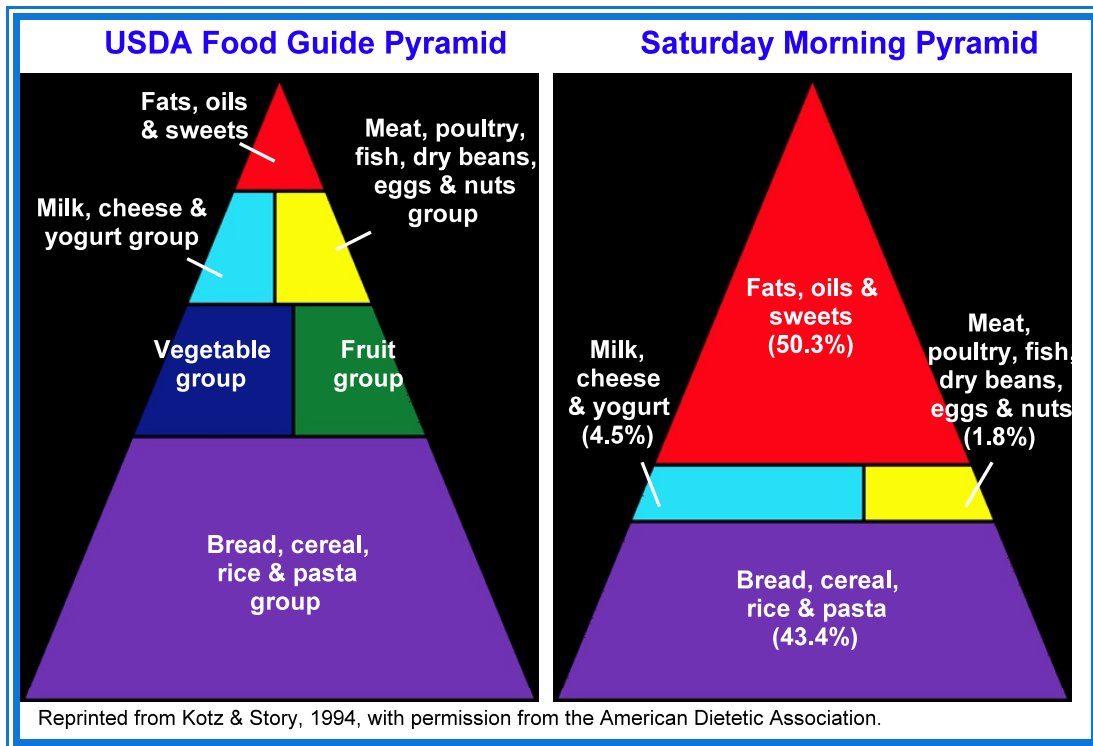
Product Category	Advertising Expenditures	
	(millions)	Share (%)
Prepared, convenience foods	\$1,563	22
Candy & snacks	\$1,095	15
Alcoholic beverages	\$1,082	15
Soft drinks	\$702	10
Cooking products, seasonings	\$675	9
Coffee, tea, juices	\$625	9
Dairy products	\$505	7
Bakery goods	\$408	6
Meat, poultry, fish	\$210	3
<b>Fruits, vegetables, grains, beans</b>	<b>\$159</b>	<b>2</b>
General promotions	\$50	1

\* For all foods, not just ads aimed at children. Gallo, 1999.

### Types of Food Advertised.

Overall, most of food advertising is for low-nutrition foods, such as convenience foods, fast food, candy, snack foods and soft drinks (see table) (Gallo, 1999). Only 2% of advertising by food manufacturers is for fruits, vegetables, grains and beans combined, the foods that should make up the bulk of a healthy diet. **The overwhelming majority of food ads aimed at children is for foods and beverages high in sugars, fat and/or salt, such as sugary cereals, sweetened drinks, fast food, candy and chips**

“The diet presented on Saturday morning television is the antithesis of what is recommended for healthful eating for children,” wrote Kotz and Story (1994). The researchers found that half (50%) of the advertised foods fell into the fats, oils and sweets category of the USDA food guide pyramid. Although 43% of the ads were for foods from the grains group (the largest food group of the pyramid), more than 60% of those were for high-sugar cereals.<sup>1</sup> Only a small percentage of the advertisements were for foods from the dairy category (4%, half of which



(Gamble & Cotugna, 1999; Consumers International, 1996; Taras & Gage, 1995; Kotz & Story, 1994). Few to no ads are for fruits and vegetables. Less than 10% of the ads are for foods low in sugar, fat and salt (Taras & Gage, 1995).

<sup>1</sup> High-sugar cereals were those with more than 20% sugar by weight, except for those in which sugar was the primary ingredient by weight, which were included in the fats, oils and sweets category, in accordance with USDA Child Nutrition Program criteria.

were for chocolate milk) or the meat/protein food group (2%, all of which were for chicken nuggets). The remaining food ads were for fast-food restaurants (11%) and frozen meals (2%), which were largely high in fat. None of the ads were for fruits or vegetables.

### Government Programs to Encourage Healthy Eating

While low-nutrition foods are aggressively marketed to children, children are rarely encouraged by marketers to choose healthy foods. Moreover, federal and state governments invest few resources in promoting healthy eating to children. Overall, funding for nutrition education pales in comparison to the ad budgets for low-nutrition foods (see table).

The National Cancer Institute's 5 A Day program, which promotes fruit and vegetable intake, has a Fiscal Year 2003 communications budget of \$3.5 million dollars and little of that is directed at children (Green, 2003). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity has a FY 2003 budget of \$34 million. While CDC and the states it funds have activities to encourage healthy eating by children and a national media campaign that promotes physical activity to middle-school-age children (funded at \$51 million for FY 2003), CDC does not have a coordinated, national communications effort to promote healthy eating to children. USDA spent \$10 million on school-based nutrition education for children (the Team Nutrition program) in FY 2003.

### Food Advertising vs. Nutrition Education

	Budget (millions)
<b>Nutrition Programs*</b>	
CDC, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity	\$34
USDA, Team Nutrition	\$10
NCI, 5 A Day program	\$4
<b>Food Advertising**</b>	
<b>Fast Food</b>	
McDonald's	\$665
Burger King	\$385
Wendy's	\$242
Pizza Hut	\$152
<b>Candy</b>	
M&M's	\$74
Snickers	\$32
Reeses candy	\$29
Kit Kat	\$14
<b>Soft Drinks</b>	
Coca-Cola and Diet Coke	\$209
Pepsi and Diet Pepsi	\$173
Gatorade sports drinks	\$94
Sprite	\$84
Sunny Delight fruit drink	\$24
<b>Other</b>	
Kellogg cereals	\$284
Betty Crocker foods	\$72
Jell-O desserts	\$56
Pringles	\$29
Ruffles potato chips	\$28
Doritos	\$27
Breyers ice cream	\$12

\*Budgets for FY 2003

\*\*Budgets for 2000 (measured media only) (Ad Age, 2001)





## Ways and Means of Marketing Food to Children

### Television

A wide variety of media are used to advertise and market food to children. However, as discussed above, children spend more time watching television than with any other medium. Television is also the dominant medium used to advertise food, capturing 70% of all food-advertising dollars (see table), and probably the food-advertising dollars spent to reach children.

Marketers reach children through kid-oriented channels like Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network, as well as during child-directed programming on broadcast and cable stations. They also use “non-commercial” stations to influence children.

Advertising on “Commercial-Free” Children’s Television. There is no children’s television that parents can count on to be free of advertising. Even public television, i.e., PBS, runs advertisements. PBS’s ad guidelines allow only for “brief, generic, value-neutral descriptions” of a product and do not permit the product to be shown, though use of company logos and mascots or spokescharacters are allowed (PBS, 2003). Sponsorship

spots during children’s programs on PBS include those for Chuck E. Cheese’s restaurants, McDonald’s, Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes cereal, Post Alpha-Bits cereal and Franco-American Spaghetti Os.

### Food Advertising Spending by Medium\*

<b>Medium</b>	<b>Spending (in millions)</b>	<b>% Total†</b>
Television	\$6,618	71%
<i>National television</i>	\$3,116	
<i>Spot television</i>	\$2,127	
<i>Cable television</i>	\$1,375	
Print	\$1,445	16%
<i>Magazine</i>	\$1,255	
<i>Newspaper</i>	\$132	
<i>Sunday magazine</i>	\$58	
Radio	\$355	4%
Outdoor	\$256	3%
<b>Total (measured)‡</b>	<b>\$9,295</b>	

\**Advertising Age*, 2002. Figures are for all food ads, not just those aimed at children.

†Some media, such as internet and Yellow Pages, are excluded.

‡Includes only paid advertising expenditures. Does not include PR, coupons and other forms of promotion.

When it was launched in the early 1980s, the Disney Channel did not accept any outside advertising. In 2002, that changed, and Disney began to air commercials for McDonald’s at the beginning and end of programs during its preschool program block, Playhouse Disney. Though Disney calls the spots sponsorships, rather than advertisements, they are part of an extensive joint marketing arrangement between the two companies that includes theme parks and movie tie-ins with McDonald’s food (WSJ, 2002).

## Magazines

In 2001, there were 250 magazines published for children and adolescents, up from 130 in 1989 (Magazine Publishers of America, 2003a).<sup>2</sup> They include *Nickelodeon* magazine, *Disney Adventures*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Seventeen*, *CosmoGirl* and *Teen People*. Most of the popular children's magazines carry advertising (see table).

In addition, children's magazines include many hidden advertisements – ads presented as games, puzzles, comics and editorials (Kraak & Pelletier, 1998a).

### Advertising in Popular Children's Magazines, 2003\*

<u>Publication</u>	<u>Circulation</u>	<u>Number of ad pages per month<sup>†</sup></u>	<u>Ad revenue per month<sup>†</sup></u>
<i>Seventeen</i>	2,432,000	110	\$9,453,000
<i>CosmoGirl</i>	1,055,000	87	\$6,850,000
<i>Teen People</i>	1,652,000	76	\$6,013,000
<i>Nickelodeon</i>	1,022,000	31	\$1,904,000
<i>Sport Illustrated for Kids</i>	774,000	30	\$2,096,000
<i>Disney Adventures</i>	1,117,000	20	\$1,240,000
<i>Boys' Life</i>	1,410,000	11	\$405,000

\*Magazine Publishers of America, 2003b; Ad Age, 2003. <sup>†</sup>Based on figures for May 2003.



<sup>2</sup> While the reported number of children's magazines decreased to 180 in 2002, the 2002 number is an outlier from a clear trend of the number of youth magazines increasing between 1989 and 2001.

## Food Availability

One key goal of manufacturers, restaurants and marketers is to ensure that their products are never far from children's reach. With over 420,000 restaurants and other food service outlets in the country, there are opportunities to eat out almost everywhere children go – shopping malls, gas stations, movie theaters, highway rest stops, sporting events, etc. (US Census Bureau, 1997). That includes approximately 174,000 kid-oriented fast-food outlets. There are vending machines in approximately 1.4 million schools, worksites, colleges, hospitals, public buildings and other locations (Lavay, 2002).

## Food Marketing in Schools

Marketing in schools has become big business. Businesses see it as an opportunity to make direct sales and to cultivate brand loyalty. They realize that schools are a great place to reach children, since almost all attend school and they spend a large proportion of their waking hours there. School-based marketing also adds credibility to marketing activities by associating the company's name and product with trusted schools or teachers.

Nineteen states have laws or regulations that address commercial activities in schools, but just five of those are comprehensive in nature (GAO, 2000). Only 12% of schools

prohibit the sale of junk foods<sup>3</sup> out of vending machines, school stores, snack bars and other venues outside of the school cafeteria (CDC, 2000b). Some have defended the sales of low-nutrition foods at schools by saying that if schools do not sell these foods, children will just buy them off campus. However, 75% of senior high schools, 90% of middle/junior high schools and 95% of elementary schools have closed-campus policies (CDC, 2002b).

National PTA guidelines state that "public schools must not be used to promote commercial interest" (National PTA, 2002). The National Association of State Boards of Education's (NASBE) policy on school-business relationships states that "selling or providing access to a captive audience in the classroom for commercial purposes is exploitation and a violation of the public trust" (NASBE, 1998).

Many companies are taking advantage of schools' financial difficulties by offering marketing dollars as a way for schools to bridge budget gaps.

Commercial activities in schools include: 1) product sales, such as food sales out of vending machines, exclusive soft drink contracts, fundraising activities or receipt rebate programs; 2) direct advertising, such as ads on vending machines, scoreboards, posters, school publications, book covers, banners in gymnasiums and Channel One; 3) free

<sup>3</sup>CDC defines junk foods as foods that provide calories primarily through fats or added sugars and have minimal amounts of vitamins and minerals.

product samples; 4) indirect advertising, such as corporate-sponsored educational materials and teacher training, contests in which children receive product prizes, incentive programs and corporate gifts in which the donor benefits commercially; and 5) market research, such as student surveys or panels and tracking of students' Internet activities (GAO, 2000).<sup>4</sup>

### Schools with Vending Machines, Stores, Snack Bars\*

School Level	Percentage
Elementary	43%
Middle/Junior High	74%
High School	98%

\*CDC, 2000b

Product Sales in Schools. The General Accounting Office (GAO) found that “product sales – primarily the sale of soft drinks by schools or districts under exclusive contracts and short-term fundraising sales – were the most common and lucrative type of commercial activity at the schools visited” (GAO, 2000). Vending machines, school stores, canteens or snack bars are in almost half of

elementary schools, three-quarters of middle schools and virtually all high schools (see table) (CDC, 2000b). The most common items sold are soft drinks, fruit drinks that are not 100% juice, and salty snack foods and sweet baked goods that are not low fat. Vending machines not only dispense high-calorie, low-nutrition foods, but the fronts and sides of the machines often are ads in and of themselves.



Vending machines not only dispense high-calorie, low-nutrition foods, but the fronts of the machines are often ads.

Of all product sales in schools, exclusive soft-drink contracts are the fastest-growing ventures (GAO, 2000). Half of school districts have contracts with soft drink companies (CDC, 2000b). However, the conditions and profitability of exclusive soft drink contracts vary considerably from district to district (GAO, 2000). Though some contracts appear to be lucrative, the funds raised usually represent only a small fraction of a district's overall budget. On average, contracts generate from \$3 to \$30 per student per year, and even the most lucrative contract provides less than 0.5% of a school district's budget (GAO, 2000).

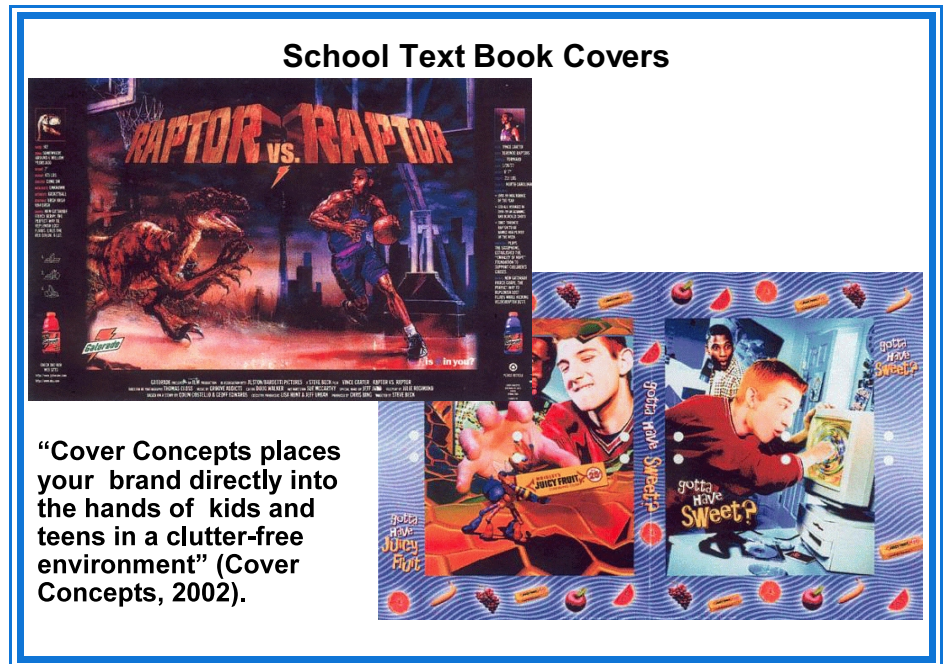
<sup>4</sup>A list of companies that advertise in schools is available from Consumers Union at <http://www.consumersunion.org/other/sellingkids/advertiserlist.htm>.

Exclusive soft drink contracts usually include provisions under which the district or school earns more revenue the more soft drinks they sell. About 80% of districts receive a percentage of sales and 63% receive incentives tied to sales (CDC, 2000b). Such arrangements create a situation in which it is in the financial interest of the school administration for students to drink more soda and can lead schools to promote soft drinks to children and make them more available (in more locations or for longer periods of time during the school day).

The percentage of public schools, participating in the National School Lunch Program, that offer **brand-name fast food** rose six-fold (from 2% to 13%) between the 1990 and 1995 school years (GAO, 1996). By 2000, brand-name fast food was offered in 20% of schools (CDC, 2000c).

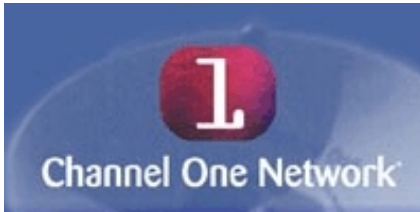
**Fundraising** by student groups, parent-teacher organizations, booster clubs and athletic programs often involves the sale of low-nutrition foods. About 80% of schools sell foods or beverages for fundraising (CDC, 2002b). Of those schools, 76% sell chocolate candy, 67% sell baked goods that are not low fat, and 63% sell non-chocolate candy.

Direct Advertising in Schools. The GAO (2000) found that the most visible and prevalent advertisements in



schools are soft drink ads (including on beverage vending machines) and corporate logos on scoreboards. Other advertising in schools is on book covers, posters, school buses, school calendars, school newspapers and printed programs for school events. A survey of California high schools found that 39% of districts had fast food and beverage ads on posters, 28% had ads on scoreboards or signs, and only 13% prohibited advertising (15% of districts did not respond) (Craypo et al., 2002).

**Channel One** is a for-profit enterprise that provides electronic equipment (a satellite dish, wiring, VCRs and televisions in each classroom) to schools in exchange for schools showing students (in at least 80% of classrooms on 90% of school days) a 12-minute news program, including 2 minutes of commercials (GAO, 2000). Channel One promotional materials boast that it has “television’s largest teen audience” (Channel One News,



2002), with more than 8 million viewers in over 12,000 middle, junior and high schools (Channel One, 2003). However, public pressure has kept Channel One out of New York public schools.

Channel One promotes unhealthy eating habits to children by airing ads for low-nutrition foods, including Pepsi, Snapple, MUG root beer, Gatorade, Snickers candy bars and Starburst candy. Channel One adds credibility to advertising because it is shown in school, and adds to children's television viewing time, which already exceeds recommended levels. In addition, Channel One cuts into instruction time. Class time lost to Channel One has been estimated to cost taxpayers \$1.8 billion a year (Reid & Gedissman, 2000), with 6 hours of class time devoted to advertising each school year.<sup>5</sup>

Channel One positions itself with educators as a way to "empower young people by keeping them informed of current events" (Channel One, 2002). However, the company's sales tape paints a different picture (Channel One, 1996). The tape states that "Millions of teenagers are all over the place but there's one place where you can get to them." Then, the tape cuts to children

<sup>5</sup>Based on a 180-day school year.

watching Channel One in school. Several people on the tape, including teachers, explain how much the kids pay attention to the commercials.

School Contests, Coupons and Incentives. Another way that food companies market their products to children is by sponsoring contests and giving away coupons in schools.

**\$2,500 Products**                      **\$59 Stapler**

With Campbell's Labels for Education program, students' families have to buy about \$2,500 worth of soup to obtain enough labels to get a \$59 heavy-duty stapler for their school.

✗ Kraft sponsored a contest in which elementary-school "kids from across the country ... sing the praises of hot dogs and bologna" for the chance to win \$10,000 for their school's music program (Kraft Foods, 2002).<sup>6</sup>

✗ With Campbell's Labels for Education program, students collect labels from Campbell products and redeem them for school supplies, musical instruments or food service equipment (Campbell Soup Company, 2003). However, the program requires students' families to

<sup>6</sup>In July 2003, Kraft Foods announced that it will no longer market its products in schools. However, school-based marketing was not a major marketing venue for Kraft.

buy almost \$15,000 worth of soup to earn one stock pot for the school kitchen (12,400 required labels from cans of soup that cost about \$1.20 each) or \$2,500 worth of soup to get a heavy duty stapler (2,100 labels).

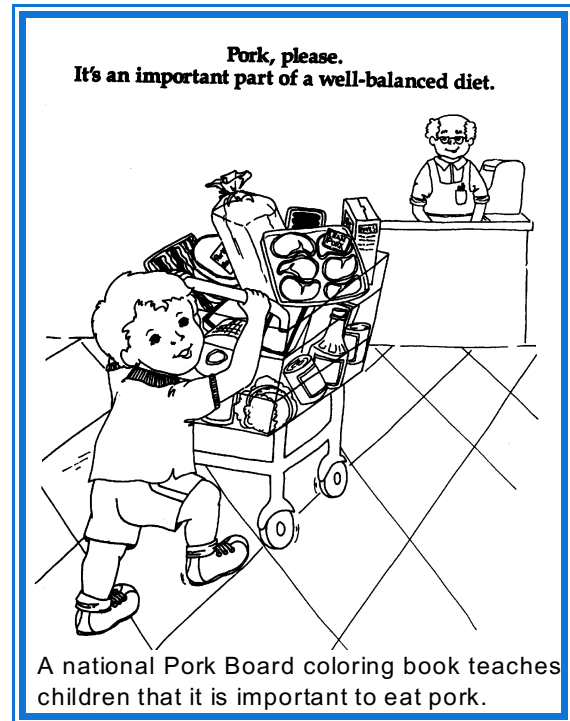
✗ The Pepsi Notes contest provided musical instruments to schools in exchange for note symbols collected from Pepsi and Frito-Lay packages (PepsiCo, 2002).

✗ Pizza Hut has a school-based program that rewards elementary school students for reading a required number of books by giving them a coupon for a free Personal Pan Pizza (Pizza Hut, 2003). Not only does this program use a low-nutrition food to reward academic achievement, but it often results in other family members eating – and paying for their own meals – at the restaurant (which, of course, is a goal of the promotion).

✗ The Krispy Kreme Good Grades program offers elementary school children one doughnut for each “A” they earn on their report card (and up to six doughnuts per grading period) (Krispy Kreme, 2003).

Only Alabama and the District of Columbia prohibit the use of food to reward children for good behavior or academic performance, and seven other states (Alaska, Arkansas, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Wisconsin and Wyoming) discourage this practice (CDC, 2001a).

Corporate-Sponsored Educational Materials. Consumers Union found that 80% of the 77 industry-



sponsored educational materials they reviewed promoted the company's agenda or consumption of their product(s) or included biased or incomplete information (Consumers Union, 1998a).

Several food companies provide educational materials for children. The content of McDonald's *What's On Your Plate* video (McDonald's, 2002b) and the National Dairy Council's *Pyramid Cafe Student Workbook* are not overly commercial or misleading (National Dairy Council, 1998). However, the Dairy Council's workbook emphasizes milk over the other food groups by consistently listing the milk food group first and by showcasing only dairy foods, including the "Got Milk" ad slogan, on the back page of the workbook. The National Pork Board's *Learning about Pork* coloring book teaches children that pork is "an important part of a well-

balanced diet” and that “healthy pigs are happy” (National Pork Board, 1996). Other materials do not seek to teach nutrition directly, but aim to cultivate brand identity and loyalty. Coca-Cola and McDonald’s co-sponsor the *Little Known Black History Facts Education Kit*, and McDonald’s has materials on subjects ranging from fire safety to suicide prevention (McDonald’s, 2002b). For grades K-5, teachers can call their local McDonald’s restaurant and arrange for “inspirational lessons...hosted by Ronald McDonald.”

Schools in California are prohibited by law from using materials containing corporate logos, commercial brand names and products unless the use of the logo, brand name or product is necessary for educational purposes (California Education Code, 2003).

### **Toys, Books, Clothing and Other Products with Brand Logos**

Many manufacturers sell toys, books and apparel that are advertisements for their products. Dr. Marion Nestle, chair of Nutrition and Food Studies at New York University, calls these “ads you buy” (Nestle, 2002). The Coca-Cola website sells T-shirts, toys, games, sports gear and other child-oriented products with the Coca-Cola standard logo and/or polar bear mascot (Coca-Cola, 2002). The McDonald’s Kids’ Stuff website sells tee-shirts (including in sizes for 2 to 4 year olds), a “Happy Meal Guys” lunch box, soft dolls

representing a hamburger, fries and a drink, and the Let’s Go to McDonald’s Game (McDonald’s, 2002a). Kellogg sells dolls of its cereal icons (Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam, etc.), as well as toys, clothing, cereal bowls, spoons and snack containers (Kellogg, 2002).



Food ads also come in the form of toys, clothes, games and books.

McDonald’s Fun Time! Restaurant Playset comes with a food counter and miniature fries, burgers, pies and sodas, all emblazoned with the golden arches. Barbie, dressed as a McDonald’s clerk, and Kelly, shown eating a Happy Meal, are sold separately. Heinz’s Sizzlin’ BBQ Play Set comes with a play grill, food and Heinz-branded ketchup, relish, pickles and BBQ sauce. M&M’s Minis serve as the fuselage for Hasbro’s Aircraft Candy Copter (toy helicopter).

There are reading and counting books for toddlers and young children centered around brand-name foods. Books include *Kellogg’s Froot Loops! Counting*



*Fun Book* and the *M&M's Brand Birthday Book*.

Reading the *Oreo Cookie Counting Book* involves eating 10 Oreos, which would provide 535 calories.

The M&M's and Froot Loops books include cut-out circles in which to place the food. There also are children's books based on Skittles, Hershey Kisses, Necco Sweetheart candies, Cheerios, Sun-Maid raisins and Pepperidge Farm Goldfish. For slightly older children, there are *Reeses's Pieces: Count by Fives*, *Skittles Riddles Math* and the *Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar Fractions Book*.



"It's not that these (snack-brand) books resemble advertising - they are advertising," stated Kate Klimo, publisher of Random House's Children's Books Division (Kirkpatrick, 2000).

Snack-brand children's books reinforce brand identities and bring additional marketing into children's lives. Although many children are already consuming too many calories, these books create additional opportunities for children to eat (often low-nutrition foods) by making eating a part of reading.

## Websites

Many food companies market their products to children on the Internet and direct children to their websites through ads and product packaging. Through on-line games and activities, the websites can provide repeated brand exposure and positive interaction with a brand to help cultivate brand identity and loyalty.

There is little separation between advertising and content on food company websites geared toward children. Food products, logos and company spokescharacters are built into the games and other website content. Unlike television commercials, which can be ignored by muting the television or flipping channels, children are completely absorbed while playing an "advergame." Advergames on food company websites may be short compared to computer or console games, but they are long for advertisements (Edwards, 2003).

Nabiscoworld.com features more than 50 games, puzzles, screen savers and sweepstakes, each sponsored by a brand of Nabisco's cookies and snacks.<sup>7</sup> Some of the games are aimed at toddlers such as *Where's Teddy?*, a game where toddlers find hidden Teddy Graham cookies (Nabisco, 2003a). In the *Oreo Adventure* game, when children find the golden cookie jars on their journey to the Temple of the Golden Oreo, their "health" is reset to 100% (Nabisco, 2003b). If children click

<sup>7</sup> Based on a count of site map links at <<http://www.nabiscoworld.com>> on May 25, 2003.



on the *Watch the Videos* link on the Chips Ahoy section of the Nabisco website, they will see not movie clips, but rather television commercials for chips Ahoy! cookies (Nabisco, 2003c). Kraft Food's Candystand.com includes numerous advergames and sweepstakes promoting Life Savers candy and receives more than 1 million unique visitors a month (Edwards, 2003). The Hershey Foods' site has games, puzzles, recipes and a quiz to test children's knowledge of Hershey's ads and products (Hershey Foods, 2003). The Kellogg site includes a "nutrition camp" hosted by sugary cereal icons such as Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam and Dig'em, the Smacks frog (Kellogg Company, 2003). The site teaches children that calories are "the action heroes of the food world" and that "Kellogg's cereals are loaded with carbohydrates – your body's preferred source of energy." The McDonald's kids' website has an alphabet game, coloring activities, quizzes and riddles (McDonald's Corporation, 2002c).

## Stealth Advertising: Product Placement

Food companies also market products to children through product placement (paying a fee or donating products to be incorporated into movies and television programs). In the 2002 blockbuster *Spider-Man*, the hero used his newly-discovered web-spinning power to retrieve a Dr. Pepper. A Dr. Pepper spokesman said, "We felt it would attract audiences of all ages, and especially teens and young adults" (Elliott, 2002). A futuristic-looking Big Mac, fries and soda, featuring the McDonald's arches, pops out of the Cortez children's lunch box in *Spy Kid's 2*, and Heinz ketchup appears in Warner Bros.' *Scooby Doo* movie. Canada Dry vending machines appeared on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (though in reality, Canada Dry vending machines do not exist) (Vista Group, 2002b).

Children are unlikely to recognize product placement as advertising because it is an integral part of a movie or program and thus, children may be less skeptical of, and perhaps more susceptible to, it than to more obvious forms of advertising. Placement agencies claim that product placements may have more credibility than paid advertising and can provide implied endorsements when an actor uses a product (Vista Group, 2002a).

In a study of adults, Gupta and Lord (1998) found that prominent product placements were remembered better than advertisements of similar length, though advertisements were more

memorable than subtle product placements.

Other studies also have found that product placements are remembered, and one found that placements increase reported intention to purchase featured brands (Karrh, 1998).

Product placements create and reinforce social norms regarding the product. They also undermine parental responsibility and control because they cannot be skipped over and avoided. However, some argue that brand placements are a necessary component of programs and movies to make them realistic, because brands are a part of everyday life.

“Placements are shown in the context of the show. They cannot be skipped over like print ads, ‘zapped’ by VCR users, or ignored by viewers,” Vista Group, a product placement agency (2002a).

The surge in sales of Reese’s Pieces (which was not a paid product placement) after the original release of *E.T.* sparked a significant increase in product placements (Beck, 2001). *Kidscreen*, an online marketing magazine, wrote, “Product placement in movies, particularly in kids’ and teen films, is now at an all-time high and has become a mini-industry unto itself” (Beck, 2001).

The cost of product placements in movies varies depending on how long and how prominently the product is

displayed, and whether a character in the movie interacts with it (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). However, in many cases, especially for television, the client provides the legal rights to use a product and/or extra product to the studio, rather than a monetary fee.

Television stations are required by the Federal Communications Commission to disclose product placements for which money or services are either directly or indirectly received or promised, notifying the audience that the product was sponsored, paid for or provided and by whom (FCC, 2002). However, such disclosures would be in small print at the end of a television show and are unlikely to be seen, especially by children. In addition, the policy does not require that a payment made to an agency for a product placement be made public.

A study of prime time programs (which were not all aimed at children) on the four major broadcast television stations (ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC) found about 10 brand appearances per half hour program for situational comedies and 58 brand appearances per half hour of sports programming (Avery & Ferraro, 2000).

### **Kid’s Clubs**

Unlike real clubs where children come together around common interests to have fun and make friends, kid’s clubs or birthday clubs hosted by food companies act largely as vehicles for advertising to children and sending them magazines (often with ads), coupons or catalogs (Consumers Union, 1990). Burger King and Blimpie Subs

and Salads have kid's clubs, and California Pizza Kitchen, Baskin Robbins and Denny's restaurants sponsor birthday clubs. The Blimpie Important Person (BIP) Club e-mails children regarding "coupon distribution, when (their) commercials will be airing on television, and all other Blimpie information" (Blimpie, 2003).

By joining the Baskin Robbins' Birthday Club, a child 12 or under is given a coupon for a free kids-sized ice cream cone on his birthday (as well as other offers from Baskin Robbins, Dunkin' Donuts and Togo's throughout the year). Denny's restaurant offers a free kid's entree and sundae for children's birthdays, but kids can only get their "free" meal with the purchase of a regularly priced adult entree (Denny's, 2003).

### **Packaging and Placement in Supermarkets and Other Retail Stores**

Even if parents manage to limit their children's exposure to television advertising, there is a great deal of in-store food marketing aimed at children. Food manufacturers pay grocery stores "slotting" and "pay-to-stay" fees in order to get and keep good shelf space (Dimitri, 2001; Federal Trade Commission, 2001). That is one reason for the large amount of space devoted to cereals, chips and candy in grocery stores and why children's products are placed so that kids can see and reach them without assistance from a parent.

Food Packaging. The design of food packaging is carefully studied by food companies and research firms.

Grocery stores are "designed for kids. That's why you always see a kid tugging at someone's arm saying 'Buy this,'" said Greg Kahn, founder of Kahn Research Group (ElBoghdady, 2003).

Companies design their packages to stand out and appeal to children, carefully choosing the color, the product name, ease of use of the packaging, portion size and use of cartoon or other characters (Food Processing, 1997). Red has been shown to be a powerful color, signaling sweetness and/or excitement, and is used for the packaging of products such as Coca-Cola and Kellogg's Froot Loops (Lindner, 1999).



Belly Washers uses fun packaging and cartoon characters to sell sugar water.

The fun and attention-getting colors of Heinz' Blastin' Green and Funky Purple ketchup are, in part, responsible for the growth of Heinz market share since 2000 (McGinn, 2003). The company also credits easier-to-squeeze packaging as important to the products'

success (Eig, 2001). Easier-to-use packaging appeals to children who often prefer to serve themselves and want greater independence and control during meals.

Many companies feature cartoon or other movie or television characters on their product packages to increase sales to children (see table). Food companies also design their own “spokes-characters” to sell products to children.

Mars uses the M&M’s characters, which the company claims are more popular than Bart Simpson or Mickey Mouse (Mars, 2002). Kellogg has Tony the Tiger, Snap, Crackle and Pop, Toucan Sam and Dig’em the frog to sell its cereal. General Mills uses the Pillsbury Doughboy and the Trix rabbit. Frito-Lay created Chester Cheetah to help sell Cheetos cheese snacks. And of course, McDonald’s has the clown, Ronald McDonald.

### Cartoon or Other Characters on Food Packages

<u>Company</u>	<u>Product</u>	<u>Characters</u>
Nabisco	Dora the Explorer Teddy Grahams cookies	Dora the Explorer
Edy’s	Fish ‘n Chips ice cream	Characters from Disney’s <i>Finding Nemo</i>
General Mills	fruit snacks	Elmo, Snow White, Little Mermaid, Cinderella
ConAgra Foods	Kid Cuisine frozen dinners	Powerpuff Girls, Fairly Odd Parents, Wild Thornberrys, Rugrats
Nabisco	Ritz crackers, Oreo cookies	Hulk
Ore Ida	Funky Fries	Jimmy Neutron
Kraft	Macaroni & Cheese	SpongeBob Squarepants
Kellogg	Spidey-Berry flavored Pop-Tarts and Spider-Man cereal	Spider-Man
Kellogg	cereals	Disney’s Buzz Lightyear, Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh and the <i>Lion King’s</i> Pumba, Timon and Simba