

Fast food companies still target kids with marketing for unhealthy products

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(Medical Xpress)—In 2012 the fast food industry spent \$4.6 billion to advertise mostly unhealthy products, and children and teens remained key audiences for that advertising, according to a new report by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity. The report highlights a few positive developments, such as healthier sides and beverages in most restaurants' kids' meals, but also shows that restaurants still have a long way to go to promote only healthier fast-food options to kids.

"There were some improvements, but they have been small, and the pace

too slow," said Marlene Schwartz, Rudd Center director. "Without more significant changes, we are unlikely to see meaningful reductions in unhealthy [fast food](#) consumption by young people."

The report, "Fast Food FACTS 2013," is a follow-up to a report released in 2010. Using the same methods, researchers examined 18 of the top fast-food restaurants in the United States and documented changes in the nutritional quality of menu items along with changes in marketing to [children](#) and teens on TV, the Internet, social media, and mobile devices.

Detailed findings of the report will be presented Nov. 5 at the American Public Health Association's annual meeting in Boston. The report was supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Key findings include:

- Children ages 6 to 11 saw 10% fewer TV ads for fast food, but children and teens continued to see three to five fast food ads on TV every day;
- Healthier kids' meals were advertised by a few restaurants, but they represent only one-quarter of fast-food ads viewed by children;
- Less than 1% of kids' meals combinations at restaurants meet nutrition standards recommended by experts, and just 3% meet the industry's own Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative and Kids LiveWell nutrition standards;
- Spanish-language advertising to Hispanic preschoolers, a population at high risk for obesity, increased by 16%;
- Fast food marketing via social media and mobile devices—media that are popular with teens—grew exponentially.

- "Most [fast food restaurants](#) stepped up advertising to children and teens," said Jennifer Harris, the Rudd Center's director of marketing initiatives and lead author of the report. "Most advertising promotes unhealthy regular menu items and often takes unfair advantage of young people's vulnerability to marketing, making it even tougher for parents to raise healthy children.

The authors recommend that restaurants apply nutrition standards to all kids' meals and automatically provide healthy sides and beverages. They also should stop marketing their least healthy items to children and [teens](#) in ways that take advantage of their vulnerabilities, added the researchers.

The full [report](#) and tools for consumers and researchers are available online.

More information: fastfoodmarketing.org/

Provided by Yale University

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