

Kids' fast food ads emphasize giveaways more than food

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Fast-food marketing aimed at children emphasizes giveaways and movie tie-ins much more frequently than ads targeted at adults, according to research published August 28 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by James Sargent and colleagues from the Geisel School of Medicine, Dartmouth.

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The researchers compared ads from fast food companies on children's TV channels such as Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network to those aired for adults. Ads targeted at children emphasized food packaging and street views of the restaurants, whereas adult ads emphasized the images of the food sold there. Nearly 70 percent of children's advertisements included toy giveaways, whereas only 1 percent of ads for adults mentioned giveaways. Audio scripts for adult advertisements emphasized food taste, price and portion size, whereas the children's ads focused on movie tie-ins and free toys.

Previous studies have shown that associating fast food with animated characters can enhance children's perceived food tastes and preference, and exposure to advertising is associated with higher consumption of fast food by children. Marketing guidelines from the Better Business Bureau state that food should be the focus of advertising to children, and foods and meal combinations being advertised should meet certain nutritional criteria.

The study concludes, "Given health concerns about obesity and its relation to fast [food consumption](#), enhanced oversight of fast-[food marketing](#) to children at the local, state and federal level is needed to align advertising to children with health promotion efforts and existing principles of honest and fair marketing to children."

More information: Bernhardt AM, Wilking C, Adachi-Mejia AM, Bergamini E, Marijnissen J, et al. (2013) How Television Fast Food Marketing Aimed at Children Compares with Adult Advertisements.

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