

Opinion: Junk food ads aimed at children should be banned

25 October 2016, by Dr Emma Boyland



Credit: University of Liverpool

"The World Medical Association [have called for junk food advertising to be banned during all TV programmes that are appealing to children](#). I strongly support this, and believe that the evidence base warrants further regulatory action in this area.

Several studies conducted by the appetite and obesity research group here at the University of Liverpool have demonstrated that television food advertising exposure alters children's [food preferences](#) in the direction of high fat, high sugar snack foods and also increases their consumption of these sorts of foods.

We have also shown that on television unhealthy food adverts are frequent and target children with age-specific persuasive appeals, including using promotional characters and celebrity endorsers to engage and influence children's food choices.

Current regulations focus disproportionately on programming designed for or targeted at children, such as dedicated children's channels. However,

data from the broadcast regulator themselves (OfCom) shows that children spend a majority of their viewing time outside of such programming, instead watching family viewing and more generic entertainment shows such as the X-Factor where food advertising is far less restricted.

A core recommendation of the recent WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity is to reduce children's exposure to all unhealthy food and beverage marketing. It is clear that to achieve this, policy must apply to all such marketing to which children are exposed – not just that marketing specifically targeted at them.

One in five children in the UK are overweight or obese at school entry (4-5 years), and this rises to one in three by Year 6 (10-11 years). Addressing the influence of the 'obesogenic' environment (including the abundant, persuasive promotion of [unhealthy foods](#) to our [children](#)) is a key approach for tackling [childhood obesity](#), and is an area in which action could and should be taken NOW."

Provided by University of Liverpool

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