



Claims and evidence

Food marketing to children

The claim:

Food is a legal and essential commodity. Manufacturers should be allowed to market their products without restriction in a free market.

The evidence:

Food is legal, but most ads are for unhealthy products. Children are not able to tell the difference between information and advertising, making them particularly vulnerable to persuasive marketing.¹

- Children can recognise advertising from age four to five years, but they can't understand that ads are made to sell something until they are at least 12 years old.¹
- Time and again, research shows food marketers largely promote unhealthy foods.²
- Food advertising influences the kinds of food that children like to eat and encourages them to pester parents into buying junk foods.²

The claim:

Parents should just say no to junk food. It isn't government's place to intervene in food marketing.

The evidence:

It's very difficult for parents to say no when junk food adverts are everywhere. Families don't need to turn on the television to see a food ad.

- In one recent Australian survey, there were more than 300 examples of food and beverage marketing across five major shopping centres, with 78% for unhealthy products, including adverts placed close to children's play areas.³
- In another survey, more than 50% of Australian secondary school students reported seeing an offer or giveaway for a food or drink on public transport in the past month.⁴
- One third of Australian secondary school students had received a free sample for a food or drink at a supermarket, shopping centre or on public transport.⁴

The claim:

Food advertising only encourages children to change junk food brands. It doesn't encourage them to eat more unhealthy foods.

The evidence:

Food marketers insist promotions only encourage children to switch brands, but evidence increasingly suggests food marketing encourages children to eat more unhealthy foods.⁵

- Children eat more snack foods after watching food commercials compared with toy commercials, with obese and overweight children particularly affected.⁶
- Obese children ate an extra 2000KJ of snack foods immediately after watching food adverts compared with toy adverts. This is almost half the daily energy requirement (4500KJ) of the average eight-year-old boy.⁶
- Normal weight children ate an extra 1046KJ of snack foods after watching food ads compared with after watching toy ads.⁶

The claim:

Community sports clubs rely on industry sponsorship for their survival.

The evidence:

The food industry sponsors Australian sports clubs but sponsorship does not add that much to club coffers.

- Only 41% of food and drink sponsors provide direct funding to clubs, with the rest donating goods and services.⁷
- Most clubs that receive sponsorship say less than 25% of overall income comes from these agreements.⁷
- 70% of parents support policies to restrict unhealthy sponsorship of children's sports.⁸
- Parents support a sports sponsorship fund where firms give financial support but are not able to brand kits and prizes.⁹

The claim:

Food company sponsorship in elite and junior sports clubs does not affect children's behaviour and diet.

The evidence:

Food company branding, which can include logos on team kits and food and drink reward vouchers, promotes brand loyalty in children and encourages them to buy sponsors' products, many of which are unhealthy.¹⁰

- One Australian survey showed most children (69%) think club sponsors are cool and that while children have some understanding of the firms' aims to promote their products, 85% believe sponsors want to 'help out' the club.¹⁰
- Almost 60% of children say they like to return the favour by buying sponsors' products.¹⁰
- The WHO recommends that places where children gather, including sports clubs, are free from unhealthy food advertising.¹¹

The claim:

Food marketing is already regulated. We don't need more rules.

The evidence:

The food industry is self-regulating and has developed two codes to govern food marketing to children. Companies don't have to sign up to the codes and there is no independent policing.¹² The codes cover advertising but not sports clubs sponsorship.¹² Australian evidence suggests that this self-regulation, which was introduced in 2009, does not protect children from junk food promotion.¹³

- The number of fast food ads on Australian free-to-air television increased by almost 50% in the year after regulations were introduced. There were 1.1 fast food ads per hour on free-to-air television in 2009 rising to 1.5 per hour in 2010.¹³
- In a separate review, the rate of unhealthy food advertisements on Australian television in 2011 was not significantly different from that of 2006, before voluntary regulation.¹²
- Signatories to the Australian voluntary codes continue to advertise junk foods at times when many children watch television.¹⁴



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