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Who is Influencing Young Children's Food Preferences?

On average, one-third of product advertisements seen by children are for food, beverages, or restaurants. In 2004, food, beverages, candy, and restaurant advertising hit **\$11 billion**, compared to less than **\$10 million** to advertise the fruits and vegetables campaigns. Startlingly, the cost of sodas and sugary snacks has decreased, while the cost of fruits and vegetables has increased.

Who is influencing children's food preferences? With the amount spent on advertising, it is not surprising that research shows that young children pester their parents to buy sodas,

candy, processed and fast foods. It does not take much effort to discover how the food industry advertises their products. On a trip to the supermarket, families are bombarded with attractively wrapped, energy-dense foods. High calorie foods, such as potato chips, cookies, and soda, are strategically placed, where children can easily see and grab them.

Advertisers also tempt young children to brand cereals with brightly colored packages and pictures of familiar characters. Fast food restaurants attract children with special meals containing toys or with contests to win prizes. Children's TV programs have commercials featuring favorite cartoon characters. Children ages 2 to 7 see an average of 12 commercials for foods and beverages every day. Most of these commercials advertise candy, snacks, cereals, and fast foods. There is evidence that TV advertising influences children's food and beverage preferences and consumption. Does food advertising affect the health of young children?

References:

Out of Balance: Marketing of Soda, Candy, Snacks, and Fast Food Drowns Out Healthful Messages. Consumers Union & California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. 2005. <http://www.consumersunion.org/pdf/OutOfBalance.pdf>

Inside this Issue

Who is Influencing Young Children's Food Preferences?	1
The Health Effects of Food Marketing on Children	2
Food Ads! Capturing Children's Imagination	2-3
Keeping Children Active through Recreational Activities	4

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Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? Institute of Medicine 2005. <http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/31/339/KFM%20Glossary.2-9-06.pdf>

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Photos: Network for a Healthy California

The Health Effects of Food Marketing on Children

Food advertisement influences children's food preferences and consumption levels of marketed products. The majority of the television commercials promote foods that are low in nutritional value and high in fat, sugar, sodium, and calories. Food advertisement campaigns use attractive slogans to influence children's preferences. An example targeting preschoolers is food branded reading and counting books, such as *The M&M's Brand Chocolate Candies Counting Book* and *The Cheerios Counting Book: 1, 2, 3*.

Marketing to children involves capturing the child's visual senses and making products appealing and attractive. In one study, children between the ages of 3 and 5 made food selections based on packaging and branding. They were given two samples of the same food (chicken nuggets, hamburger, French fries, baby carrots, and milk) to taste. One sample was packaged in a plain wrapper and the other in a fast food restaurant wrapper. Children were asked if both foods tasted the same, or which they thought tasted better. Children preferred the food packaged in the fast-food container in 80% of the cases.

Several other studies measuring the effect of advertisement on food preference, frequency, and selection of brand names have been conducted. In most cases, they found television watching as the most common

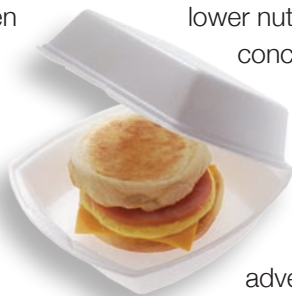
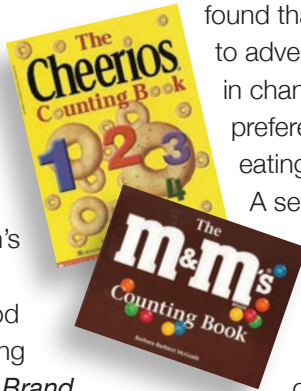
medium to expose children to powerful advertising messages. One study, comparing food preferences with the number of TVs at home, found that cumulative exposure to advertisement is effective in changing children's food preferences and frequency for eating at fast food restaurants.

A second study, involving parents, supports findings that increased exposure to advertisement was associated with increased consumption of brand name foods and energy dense foods.

Television viewing increases the frequency of food advertisement exposure. Accordingly, higher exposure to food advertisement increases the child's desire for foods that have lower nutritional value and have higher concentration of sugar, fat, and sodium. Some of these factors have been associated with obesity in children. It is plausible to make an association between food advertisement and obesity, but further research is needed to make a conclusive link.

References:

- Out of Balance: Marketing of Soda, Candy, Snacks, and Fast Food Drowns Out Healthful Messages.* Consumers Union & California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. 2005. <http://www.consumersunion.org/pdf/OutOfBalance.pdf>
- Robinson, T.N., et al. Effects of Fast Food Branding on Young Children's Taste Preferences. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med* 2007, 161(8):792-797.
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Food Ads! Capturing Children's Imagination

Young children are impressionable and uniquely susceptible to advertisement. Children younger than 4 years cannot consistently discern between television advertising and the informational content of programs.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children younger than 2 years of age should be discouraged from television watching; children 2 years and older should have less than 2 hours of screen time per day.

While more nutritious, less energy-dense foods, like salads, fruits, and vegetables, tend to be more expensive, it is important to have healthful

snacks on hand when you and your children get hungry.



References:

- Contento, I. *Nutrition Education: Linking Research, Theory, and Practice*, 2007
- The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education. Children, Adolescents and Television, Pediatrics, February 2001. <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;107/2/423>

TROPICAL FRUIT AND NUT SNACK MIX

Makes 5 servings, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup per serving

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon butter
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup honey*
- 1 teaspoon almond or coconut extract
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups old fashioned oats
- nonstick cooking spray
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sliced almonds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dried tropical fruit bits
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup raisins

Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Add honey, almond or coconut extract, and cinnamon; mix well.
3. Stir in oats and transfer to a baking sheet coated with nonstick cooking spray. Spread into a 1-inch thick layer.
4. Bake for 10 minutes, stirring once. Stir in almonds and bake for 5 to 10 minutes more.
5. Remove from oven and toss with dried fruit. Let cool completely and serve.

*Do not give honey to children under the age of one.



Nutrition information per serving:

Calories 384, Carbohydrate 62 g, Dietary Fiber 7 g, Protein 9 g, Total Fat 13 g, Saturated Fat 4 g, Trans Fat 0 g, Cholesterol. 6 mg, Sodium 67 mg

Source:

Network for a Healthy California, <http://www.cachampionsforchange.net/en/docs/Snacks/Tropical-Fruit-and-Nut-Snack-Mix.pdf>

VEGETABLE QUESADILLAS

Makes 4 servings, 1 tortilla per serving

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients

- nonstick cooking spray
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped green bell pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup frozen corn, thawed
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sliced green onion
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped tomato
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 4 (6-inch) flour tortillas
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shredded reduced fat Cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese



3. Heat tortillas in a large skillet over high heat. Place equal amounts of cheese and vegetables on each tortilla; fold in half and continue to cook until cheese is melted and tortilla is crisp and lightly browned. Serve while hot.

Nutrition information per serving:

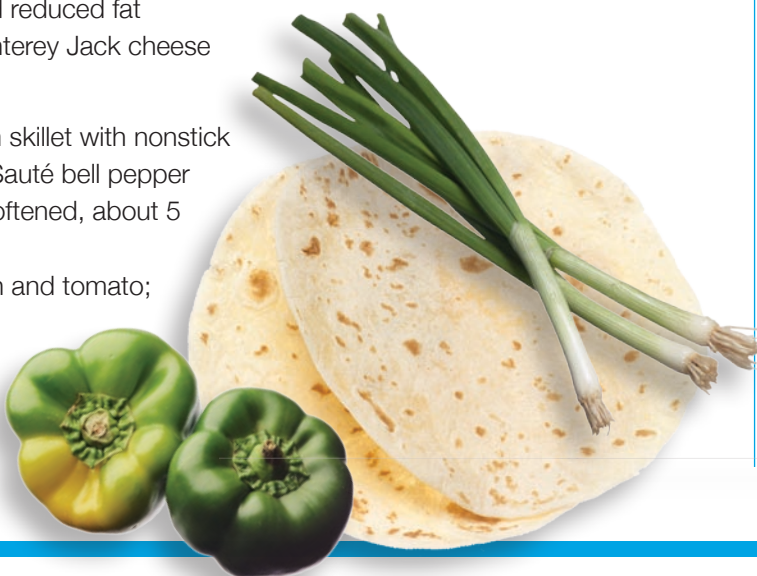
Calories 134, Carbohydrate 20 g, Dietary Fiber 2 g, Protein 7 g, Total Fat 3 g, Saturated Fat 1 g, Trans Fat 0 g, Cholesterol. 3 mg, Sodium 302 mg

Source:

Network for a Healthy California, <http://www.cachampionsforchange.net/en/docs/Snacks/Vegetable-Quesadillas.pdf>

Preparation

1. Spray a medium skillet with nonstick cooking spray. Sauté bell pepper and corn until softened, about 5 minutes.
2. Add green onion and tomato; cook for several minutes more until heated through; stir in cilantro.



TORTILLA BEAN DIP

Serving Size: 2 tablespoons

Yield: 15 servings

Ingredients

- 1 (15 ounce) can fat-free refried beans
- 3 tablespoons mild salsa
- 3 tablespoons shredded reduced fat Cheddar cheese



Preparation

1. Mix beans and salsa together in a microwave-safe bowl.
2. Add the cheese and stir.
3. Cover bowl with a paper towel and heat in microwave (high setting) for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, or until hot (or refrigerate mixture and serve cold or at room temperature).
4. Stir and serve with warmed tortillas or use as a vegetable dip.

Nutrition information per serving:

Calories 27, Carbohydrate 4 g, Dietary Fiber 1 g, Protein 2 g, Total Fat 0 g, Saturated Fat 0 g, Trans Fat 0 g, Cholesterol. 0 mg, Sodium 158 mg

Source:

Foodlines, August 2002, UC Cooperative Extension Placer/Nevada County

Keeping Children Active through Recreational Activities

What is the best way to enhance a child's natural tendency to learn? Create opportunities for them to become active and engage in activities that they can observe, touch, see, and smell.

It is important to expand children's experiences and expose them to new environments, as they grow up. Part of keeping a child physically and socially active is planning a day of adventure each month. It is also good practice to familiarize a child with resources available in their community. Here are some suggestions on places to go on a walking field trip:

Library: Children can learn about books. Arranged in advance, the librarian can explain the importance of libraries and what librarians do, as well as read a story.

Garden Park: Take your lunch to the park. Contact your local park representative or ask your school gardener if they can speak to the children about landscaping, gardening, or different types of plants, flowers, and shrubs.

Seniors' Home or Retirement Home: Collaborate with your local senior center. Children can spend time talking and socializing with residents. This can be a positive, rewarding experience for all.

Fire Station: Preschoolers can learn about firemen and their jobs. In addition, they can learn about the fire trucks, how they help pump water, and how firemen keep the community safe.



Photo: UCANR Communication Services



Funded by the USDA's Food Stamp Program through the *Network for a Healthy California*. This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer. The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious food for a better diet. For information on the Food Stamp Program, call 1-888-328-3483.

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