

# Food Marketing to Children



## Food marketing to children

- Companies market food to children through television, radio, Internet, magazines, product placement in movies and video games, schools, product packages, toys, clothing and other merchandise, and almost anywhere a logo or product image can be shown.
- Food marketing techniques include the use of spokes-characters, celebrities, cartoons, toy giveaways and other premiums, collectibles, games, contests, kids' clubs, and more.
- The total amount spent on food marketing to children is about \$2 billion a year.<sup>1</sup>

## Food marketing to children works

There is no disputing the fact that the goal of food marketing is to influence children's food choices.

- Companies clearly believe that marketing works or they wouldn't spend billions of dollars a year on it.



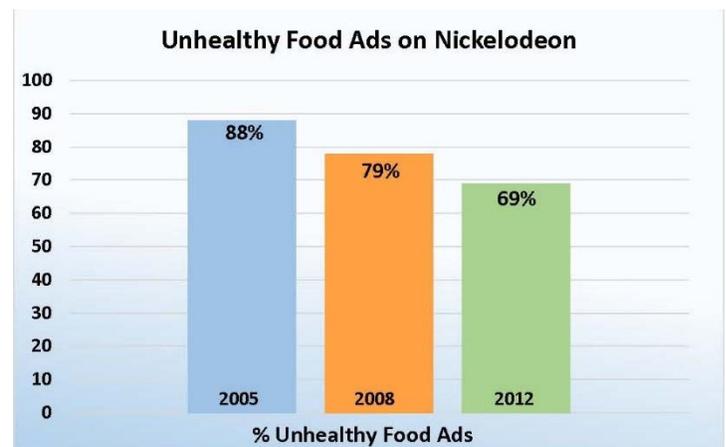
- According to a comprehensive review by the National Academies' Institute of Medicine, studies demonstrate that television food advertising affects children's food choices, food purchase requests, diets, and health.<sup>2</sup>
- Parents know from experience that ads and cartoon characters on food packages affect not only which foods their children ask them to purchase, but which foods their kids are willing to eat.
- Based on an extensive review of the research, the American

Psychological Association concluded that until the age of about 8 years old children are unable to understand the persuasive intent of advertisements.<sup>3</sup>

## Marketed foods typically are of poor nutritional quality

The overwhelming majority of foods marketed to children are of poor nutritional quality.

- Three-quarters (73%) of the foods advertised on television shows intended for children are for convenience/fast foods and sweets.<sup>4</sup>
- On Nickelodeon, the most popular children's television station, ads for foods of poor nutritional quality decreased only modestly from before self-regulation went into effect (2005) to after (2012), from about 90% to 70% of food ads.
- Only one-quarter of chain restaurants that market to children have food marketing policies and none of those address toys. Yet, 97% of children's meals at the top U.S. restaurant chains are of poor nutritional quality.<sup>5</sup>



**“Current food and beverage marketing practices put children's long-term health at risk.”**  
*National Academies' Institute of Medicine, 2006*

**Marketing foods of poor nutritional quality undermines parental authority**

Parents bear the primary responsibility for feeding their children, but parents are out-maneuvered by aggressive food marketers.

- Parental authority is undermined by wide discrepancies between what parents tell their child is healthful to eat and what marketing promotes as desirable to eat.
- While many parents have limited nutrition knowledge, companies have extensive expertise in persuasive techniques.
- Companies have resources to influence children’s food choices that parents do not have, like cartoon characters, great music, celebrities, contests, games, and toy give-aways.



**Responsible food marketing to children**

Food and beverage companies, restaurants, retail stores, schools, broadcasters, and other entertainment companies should market foods responsibly to children. The table below outlines some of the key steps toward responsible marketing to children.

Food & beverage companies and restaurants should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a written children’s food marketing policy available to the public.</li> <li>• Only promote and advertise healthful foods to children, based on a consistent set of nutrition and marketing standards.</li> <li>• Not encourage children to nag their parents to buy low-nutrition foods.</li> <li>• Develop new and reformulated products that help children eat healthfully, especially with regard to nutrient density, energy density, and portion size.</li> <li>• Cover all marketing approaches, including in elementary, middle, and high schools, on packages, through toy giveaways, and in-store promotions.</li> </ul>
Retail/stores should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace low-nutrition foods with more healthful foods or non-food items at checkout.</li> <li>• Place low-nutrition products on shelves above young children’s eye level.</li> </ul>
Entertainment companies should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a written children’s food marketing policy available to the public.</li> <li>• Company policies should cover all marketing approaches used by the company, including television, radio, magazines, websites, games, and amusement parks.</li> </ul>
Schools should...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not allow companies to market, sell, or give away low-nutrition foods or brands anywhere on school campuses, including through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Displaying logos, brand names, spokes-characters, product names, or other product marketing on/in vending machines, signs, sports equipment, or curricula and other educational materials.</li> <li>○ Using educational and other incentive programs that provide food as a reward or provide schools with money or school supplies when families buy a company’s unhealthy food products.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

For more information, please visit [www.foodmarketing.org](http://www.foodmarketing.org) or contact Kate Klimczak: [kklimczak@cspinet.org](mailto:kklimczak@cspinet.org), (202) 777-8329



<sup>1</sup> Federal Trade Commission. *A Review of Food Marketing Children and Adolescents: Follow-Up Report*. Washington, DC: Federal Trade Commission, 2012.  
<sup>2</sup> Institute of Medicine. *Food Marketing to Children: Threat or Opportunity?* Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2006.  
<sup>3</sup> Kunkel D. et al. *Psychological Issues in the Increasing Commercialization of Childhood: Report of the APA Task Force on Advertising and Children*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004.  
<sup>4</sup> Kunkel D. et al. *The Impact of Industry Self-Regulation on the Nutritional Quality of Foods Advertised to Children on Television*. Oakland, CA: Children Now, 2009.  
<sup>5</sup> Batada, A., and M. Wootan. *Kids’ Meals II: Obesity on the Menu*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2013.