



ISSUE BRIEF

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Does food and beverage marketing influence children's food choices?

Takeaways:

- Food and beverage marketing greatly influences children's diets—from the foods they prefer to the volume of what they eat.
- Marketing reaches children in myriad ways—on TV and in print, via packaging and in-store displays, online and through social media and cell phones.
- African-American and Latino youths are targeted with more advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages.

Overview

Food and beverage companies market extensively to children, even those as young as 2. While industry self-regulation has made some progress toward promoting healthier choices, youths still are exposed to heavy advertising for unhealthy foods and beverages.

Federal policymakers are beginning to address the issue. In April 2011, an interagency group representing the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention proposed voluntary nutrition principles. The principles state that marketing should bolster healthier choices, such as vegetables, fruits and whole grains, and that unhealthy fats, sugar and

sodium should be limited in foods marketed to youths.¹

MARKETING'S IMPACT ON CHILDREN

According to the Institute of Medicine, food and beverage marketing influences children's food preferences, what they want to buy and even their diet.² A 2009 study found that children who watched a TV program with food advertising ate 45 percent more food than children who watched a program with advertising for non-food items.³

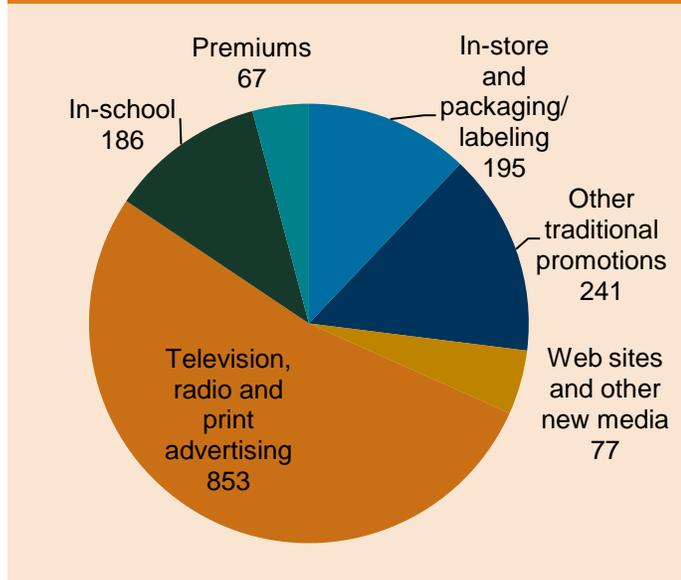
Research has shown that children prefer foods served in packages with licensed characters over the same foods served in plain packaging.³ These preferences can impact children's diets. One study found that children ages 4 to 12 who saw more food and beverage advertising consumed more of the advertised brands and more unhealthy foods, such as sugary cereals and fast food.⁴

MARKETING IN OLD MEDIA AND NEW

Food and beverage advertising is a major business. The FTC found that 44 companies spent \$1.6 billion advertising foods and beverages to youths in 2006; more than half of that was spent targeting children younger than 12.⁵ In 2009, the fast-food industry alone spent \$4.2 billion on advertising to children and adults.⁶

- **Television.** Despite the growth of digital media, television is still how most children and adolescents are exposed to marketing. Since 2007,

Reported Total Youth Marketing Expenditures in 2006 by Promotional Activity Category (in \$ millions)



Source: http://healthyeatingresearch.org/images/stories/her_research_briefs/her%20food%20mktg_brief110308final.pdf

- when industry self-regulation began through the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative of the Better Business Bureau, companies have reduced the number of TV ads to which children are exposed. But more than four out of five of the products being marketed still are unhealthy.³
- **Online.** Advertisers are developing creative ways to market to youths online. Some cereal companies run websites specifically for children, many of which feature advergames that include brand promotion. An analysis of 139 food and beverage websites with games found that less than 3 percent taught children about nutrition and health.³
- **Social media and cell phones.** Marketers are developing ways to reach youths through new media. For example, 11 of the top 12 fast-food companies maintained Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts in 2009.⁶ In 2009, eight major food and beverage companies had smartphone applications.

DISPARITIES IN MARKETING EXPOSURE

Food and beverage companies target African-American and Latino children with more advertising and for products that are less healthy.

- **More marketing.** African-American and Latino young people see more food and beverage marketing than their white peers. Neighborhoods that are mostly African-American or Latino have up to 13 times as many billboards and other outdoor ads as white neighborhoods.³ African-American and Latino youths also use digital media almost five hours more daily than white youths, making them especially attractive to marketers.³
- **Marketing for less healthy products.** Racial and ethnic minority youths see more marketing for unhealthy foods and beverages than whites. Between 2003 and 2007, African-American teens saw more TV ads for such foods as burgers, pizza and fried chicken than did white teens.⁷

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- [Food and Beverage Marketing to Children and Adolescents \(Healthy Eating Research\)](#)
- [Fast Food F.A.C.T.S. \(Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity\)](#)
- [Cereal F.A.C.T.S. \(Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity\)](#)
- [Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? \(Institute of Medicine\)](#)
- [Preliminary Proposed Nutrition Principles to Guide Industry Self-Regulatory Efforts \(Interagency Working Group\)](#)

¹ <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2011/04/foodmarket.shtm>

² <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2005/Food-Marketing-to-Children-and-Youth-Threat-or-Opportunity.aspx>

³ <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=72193>

⁴ <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=35968>

⁵ <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2008/07/foodmktg.shtm>

⁶ <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=71426>

⁷ <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=65629>