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Food Advertising to Children and Teens Score

Limited progress in the nutrition quality and marketing of children's cereals

YALE RUDD CENTER
FOR FOOD POLICY & OBESITY

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BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University issued Cereal FACTS. It documented the nutritional quality and marketing of cereals to children.[1]

The first study found that cereals marketed to children contained 85% more sugar, 65% less fiber, and 60% more sodium than products marketed to adults. In addition, children saw more advertising for cereals than for any other food or beverage product. The average preschooler viewed 1.7 cereal ads on TV every day. Cereal companies also targeted children on the Internet with extensive websites containing advergames and other branded activities. General Mills and Kellogg led in child-targeted marketing, in spite of their participation in the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI),[2] the food industry's self-regulatory program.

Since Cereal FACTS was first published, cereal companies have promised to do more, including enhancing the nutritional profile of cereals advertised to children[2] and expanding CFBAI advertising requirements. But have these changes improved the food marketing environment that surrounds children?

Three years later—using the same methods as the original Cereal FACTS—this report quantifies changes in the nutritional quality of children's cereals and children's exposure to marketing by cereal companies.

Cereals most frequently advertised to children:

1. **Cinnamon Toast Crunch**
2. **Lucky Charms**
3. **Honey Nut Cheerios**
4. **Froot Loops**
5. **Reese's Puffs**
6. **Trix**
7. **Frosted Flakes**
8. **Pebbles**
9. **Cocoa Puffs**
10. **Cookie Crisp**

Advertised cereals with the poorest nutrition ratings:

1. **Pebbles**
2. **Reese's Puffs**
3. **Cinnamon Toast Crunch**
4. **Lucky Charms**
5. **Trix**
6. **Froot Loops**
7. **Apple Jacks**
8. **Cocoa Puffs**
9. **Honey Nut Cheerios**
10. **Cookie Crisp**

BETTER FOR KIDS

From 2008 to 2011, cereal companies improved the nutritional quality of most cereals marketed directly to children and reduced advertising for some products.

- **Overall nutritional quality improved for 13 of 16 child-targeted brands** by 10% on average. Of the 22 different child-targeted cereals available in 2008 and 2011, 10 (45%) reduced the sodium, 7 (32%) reduced sugar, and 5 (23%) increased fiber. General Mills improved the nutritional quality of all of its child-targeted cereals.
- **Millsberry.com and Postopia.com**—the two most popular children's advergame sites—were discontinued, as were the Cap'n Crunch and Envirokidz child-targeted websites. Due to the elimination of Millsberry.com, General Mills decreased banner advertising on children's websites by 43%.
- **Preschoolers' exposure to TV ads for all cereals declined by 6%**, and their exposure to ads for child-targeted cereals decreased by 8%.
- Among children ages 6-11, **TV ad exposure declined for seven child-targeted cereals**. Notably, ads for Kellogg's Apple Jacks and Corn Pops went down by two-thirds, and ads for General Mills' Cookie Crisp declined by 16%. Post stopped advertising Honeycomb on TV.

WORSE FOR KIDS

From 2008 to 2011, cereal companies *increased* advertising to children for many of their least nutritious products.

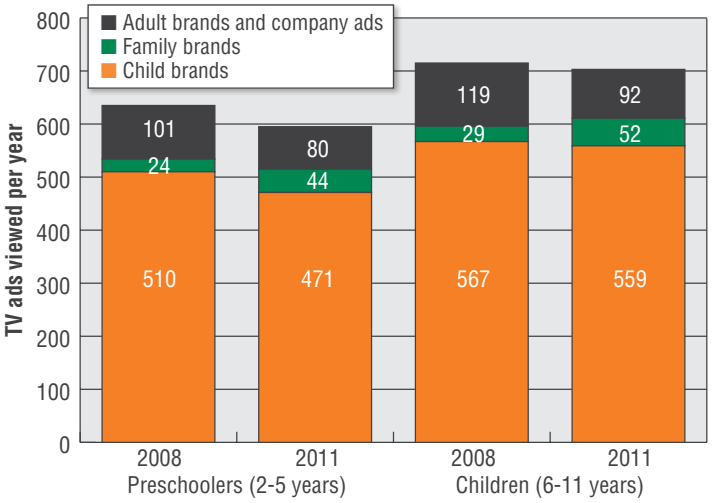
- **Total media spending to promote child-targeted cereals increased by 34%**—from $197 million in 2008 to $264 million in 2011. General Mills, Kellogg, and Post ran campaigns to promote the nutritional quality of children's cereals—their least nutritious products—to parents.
- Children's **exposure to TV ads increased for seven child-targeted cereals**—including Kellogg's Froot Loops (+79%); General Mills' Reese's Puffs (+55%) and Trix (+29%); and Post's Pebbles (+25%).
- **Post and General Mills launched new advergame websites**—PebblesPlay.com, HoneyDefender.com (Honey Nut Cheerios), and CrazySquares.com (Cinnamon Toast Crunch).
- In 2011, the number of **child visitors increased for eight of 10 child-targeted websites** that existed in 2008. On average in 2011, 162,000 children visited Kellogg's FrootLoops.com and 116,000 children visited AppleJacks.com every month.
- **Kellogg nearly doubled banner advertising** on children's websites for its child-targeted brands. **General Mills increased banner advertising for four brands**, including Honey Nut Cheerios (+185%), Lucky Charms (+58%), and Cinnamon Toast Crunch (which was not advertised in 2008-2009). Banner advertising for Post's Pebbles doubled.
- Kellogg introduced the **first food company child-targeted advergame app** for mobile phones and tablets: Apple Jacks "Race to the Bowl Rally."
- Despite an overall decline in TV ads for child-targeted cereals, **black children's total exposure to TV ads for child-targeted brands increased by 7.5%**—with the biggest increases for Kellogg's Froot Loops (+88%) and General Mills' Reese's Puffs (+72%).
- **Cereal company spending on Spanish-language TV more than doubled**—from $26 million to $65 million. Hispanic preschoolers, on average, saw 90 Spanish-language TV ads for cereals in 2011 (in addition to ads on English TV). Kellogg and General Mills launched new Spanish-language TV campaigns to promote Froot Loops and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.
- **Kellogg introduced Krave cereal** in 2012. Although the CFBAI does not list Krave as a product that may be in child-directed advertising,[3] **children ages 6 to 11 have seen more TV ads for Krave** than any other age group.

MORE OF THE SAME

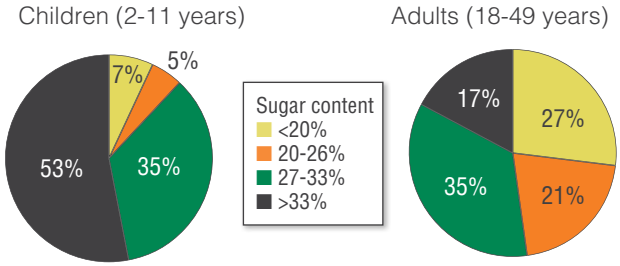
Cereal companies continue to aggressively market their least nutritious products directly to children.

- Despite improvements, the **cereals advertised to children contain 57% more sugar, 52% less fiber, and 50% more sodium** compared with adult-targeted cereals.
- Companies do offer **more nutritious and lower-sugar cereals** for children—but they are **marketed to parents, not children.**
  - ❑ One-quarter of family cereals (27%)—including 11 varieties of Kellogg's Frosted Mini-Wheats and General Mills' Multigrain Cheerios—and nearly half of adult cereals (49%) met recommended standards set by U.S. government agencies,[4] but they were not advertised to children.
- **Children still see more ads on TV for ready-to-eat cereals than any other category** of packaged food or beverage.
  - ❑ In 2011, the average 6- to 11-year-old saw more than 700 TV ads for cereals (1.9 per day), and the average 2- to 5-year-old saw 595 ads (1.6 per day)—General Mills, Kellogg, and Post continued to advertise to preschoolers, despite pledges that they would not.
  - ❑ Almost one-half (45%) of these ads promoted five brands—General Mills' Cinnamon Toast Crunch, Honey Nut Cheerios, Lucky Charms, and Reese's Puffs; and Kellogg's Froot Loops.
- **The majority of cereal ads that children see on TV promote products consisting of one-third or more sugar**—one 30-gram serving contains as much sugar as a 30-gram serving of Chips Ahoy cookies (three cookies).
  - ❑ Nearly 90% of cereal ads that children see promote products with a sugar content higher than 26%. In comparison, approximately one-half of ads seen by adults contain this level of sugar.

Children's annual exposure to cereal ads on TV*



Sugar content of cereals in TV ads viewed



Child-targeted cereals

	# of brands	Advertising spending* 2011	Advertising spending* Change vs. 2008	Average nutrient content: Sugar (g per serving)	Average nutrient content: Fiber (g per serving)	Average nutrient content: Sodium (mg per 100g)
General Mills	8	$142 million	+27%	33% (9.3 g)	6% (1.6 g)	555 mg
Kellogg	5	$108 million	+47%	32% (9.5 g)	6% (1.6 g)	475 mg
Post	2	$14 million	+17%	34% (10.0 g)	2% (0.6 g)	558 mg

*Source: Nielsen

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cereal companies have expressed a commitment to be part of the solution to childhood obesity. However, they cannot do so by making incremental improvements in the nutrition content of children's cereals—products that still contain one spoonful of sugar for every three spoons of cereal—and continue to aggressively market these products (their least nutritious cereals) to children as young as two years old.

If General Mills, Kellogg, and Post truly want to help parents raise healthy children, they must:

- Significantly reduce the hundreds of advertisements for high-sugar cereals that children see every year; and
- Use their substantial resources and creativity to find ways to encourage children to consume the healthful products in their portfolios.

We urge them to do the right thing for children's health.

REFERENCES

1. Harris JL, Schwartz MB, Brownell KD, et al. (2009). Cereal FACTS: Evaluating the nutrition quality and marketing of children's cereals. Available at www.cerealfacts.org.

2. Kolish ED, Hernandez M, Blanchard K (2011). The Children's Food & Beverage Advertising Initiative in action. Available at www.bbb.org/us/childrens-food-and-beverage-advertising-initiative/.

3. Children's Food & Beverage Advertising Initiative (April 2012). Food and beverage products that meet participants' approved nutrition standards that may be in child-directed advertising. Available at www.bbb.org/us/childrens-food-and-beverage-advertising-initiative/.

4. Interagency Working Group on Food Marketed to Children (2011). Preliminary proposed nutrition principles to guide industry self-regulatory efforts. Available at www.ftc.gov/os/2011/04/110428foodmarketproposedguide.pdf

Nutrition rankings of children's cereals

Nutrition score*					Top-10 in child-targeted marketing on:		
2012	2009	Brand**	Company	Target market	TV	Advergame websites	Third-party youth websites
31	38	Cap'n Crunch	Quaker	Family			
33	40	**Pebbles**	Post	Child	X	X	X
38	34	**Reese's Puffs**	General Mills	Child	X	X	X
40	38	Smorz	Kellogg	Family			
40	48	Honeycomb	Post	Child			
41	37	**Cinnamon Toast Crunch**	General Mills	Child	X		X
42	36	**Lucky Charms**	General Mills	Child	X	X	X
42	36	Golden Grahams	General Mills	Family			
42	38	**Trix**	General Mills	Child	X	X	X
43	39	**Froot Loops**	Kellogg	Child	X	X	X
44	40	**Apple Jacks**	Kellogg	Child		X	X
44	44	Waffle Crisp	Post	Family			
44	46	Alpha Bits	Post	Family			
45	39	**Cocoa Puffs**	General Mills	Child	X		
46	44	**Honey Nut Cheerios**	General Mills	Child	X	X	X
46	46	Golden Crisp	Post	Family			
47	38	**Cookie Crisp**	General Mills	Child	X		
47	45	**Frosted Flakes**	Kellogg	Child	X	X	X
47	41	Rice and Cocoa Krispies	Kellogg	Child		X	X
48	46	Honey Smacks	Kellogg	Family			
48	46	Cheerios (except regular and Honey Nut)	General Mills	Family			
49	45	Chex	General Mills	Family			
50	33	**Corn Pops**	Kellogg	Child		X	
50	44	Honey Nut O's	Cascadian Farm	Family			
50	48	Raisin Bran	Post	Family			
50	50	Cinnamon Crunch	Cascadian Farm	Family			
50	new	Fruitful O's	Cascadian Farm	Family			
50	50	Shredded Oats - Cinnamon Crunch	Barbara's Bakery	Family			
51	52	Envirokidz Organic	Nature's Path	Family			
52	50	Dora the Explorer	General Mills	Child			
52	54	Clifford Crunch	Cascadian Farm	Child			
53	50	Bunnies	Annie's	Family			
53	53	Life	Quaker	Family			
54	51	Kix	General Mills	Family			
54	new	Chocolate O's	Cascadian Farm	Family			
55	56	Kashi Squares	Kashi	Family			
56	58	Puffins Puffs	Barbara's Bakery	Family			
58	46	Purely O's	Cascadian Farm	Family			
58	52	Puffins	Barbara's Bakery	Family			
58	new	Life Crunchtime	Quaker	Family			
59	58	Average nutrition score for adult-targeted cereals					
70	58	Cheerios (regular)	General Mills	Family			
72	new	Golden Goodness	Kashi	Family			
73	71	Mini-Wheats	Kellogg	Family			

Worst ↓ Best

*The nutrition score is based on the nutrient profiling system developed by Rayner and colleagues at Oxford University and used by the Food Standards Agency in the United Kingdom as the basis for determining which products can be advertised to children on TV. Scores range from 0 - 100. A score of 62 or higher is defined as a healthy product.

**Bold indicates brands with child-targeted advertising on TV in 2011.

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