

Pestering Parents:

How Food Companies Market Obesity to Children

Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)

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CSPI and the Nutrition Policy Project

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. Since 1971, CSPI has been working to improve the public's health through its work on nutrition, food safety and alcohol issues. CSPI is supported primarily by the 800,000 subscribers to its *Nutrition Action Healthletter* and philanthropic foundations.

CSPI's Nutrition Policy Project is working with concerned citizens, health professionals, government officials and other nonprofit organizations to strengthen national, state and local policies and programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Our goal is to help reduce the illnesses, disabilities and deaths caused by diet- and inactivity-related diseases and conditions such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. For more information on our current projects and other policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity visit <www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy>.

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Pestering Parents is available on line (free of charge) at <www.cspinet.org/pesteringparents> or by mailing a check for \$10 to CSPI-Pestering Parents, 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20009.

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Summary

Pestering Parents outlines the importance of good nutrition to children's health, children's exposure to food marketing, the types of venues and techniques used to market food to children, the effect of that marketing on children's food choices, current regulation of food marketing aimed at children, and actions that have been taken in other countries and for other health behaviors. This report also offers recommendations for parents, industry, schools and governments to help reduce the marketing of low-nutrition foods to children.

A healthy diet is crucial to preventing obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other diseases. Those **chronic diseases/conditions often take decades to develop and have their roots in childhood, when disease processes begin and eating habits are formed.** Yet few children are eating in accordance with dietary guidelines, and the rates of childhood obesity and diabetes are rising rapidly. Parents bear most of the responsibility for feeding their children well. However, society should support parent's efforts by protecting children from practices that can harm their health.

Children's food choices are affected by many factors. One of the most important is that food companies have developed an enormous number of high-calorie foods and then relentlessly bombard children with messages to eat them. **Food marketing aimed at children has increased dramatically over the last two decades. It now reaches children almost everywhere**

they are throughout the day – through television, magazines, websites, product placement in movies, new products, product packaging, in-store displays, books, clothing and even in school, as well as ubiquitous fast-food restaurants and vending machines.

Food manufacturers and chain restaurants use aggressive and sophisticated marketing techniques to attract children's attention, manipulate their food choices, and prompt them to pester their parents to purchase products. Harry Potter, SpongeBob Squarepants, Winnie the Pooh, Elmo, games, contests, prizes and sports stars are enlisted to entice children to request low-nutrition foods.

Companies use advertising and other marketing techniques to sell more product and increase profits. While they are not intentionally trying to undermine children's health, there is **no disputing that the goal of food marketing aimed at children is to influence their food choices.**

Many children, especially young children, lack the cognitive skills and maturity to understand advertising, or to understand that advertisers are trying to sell them something or may exaggerate claims. **Studies demonstrate that advertising influences children's food preferences and choices and what they pester their parents to purchase.** Persistent nagging of parents and the need for parents to repeatedly say "no" can strain the parent-child relationship. **Conflicts arise** because the foods that are most heavily marketed to children are low-nutrition foods of which parents would

like their children to eat less. **Marketers count on children wearing their parents down and on parents giving in** and purchasing low-nutrition foods for their children.

Public policy has been used to protect children from products or behaviors that could harm them, even when such policies might negatively affect businesses. Tobacco advertising is banned from television and radio, some steps have been taken to restrict other marketing for cigarettes to venues where children are less likely to be exposed, and the sale of alcohol to people under 21 is illegal.

Since as far back as 1952, television broadcasters, in their *Television Code*, recognized that “television broadcasters should exercise the utmost care and discrimination with regard to advertising material, including content, placement and presentation, near or adjacent to programs designed for children” (National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters, 1952). That tradition is supposed to be continued through the industry-sponsored Children’s Advertising Review Unit’s (CARU) self-regulatory system. However, **from the examples outlined in this report, it is clear that many food companies and marketers are not advertising and marketing products to children responsibly and that the current regulatory system is inadequate.**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were efforts (which ultimately failed) to reduce junk-food advertising aimed at children. Given the rising obesity and diabetes rates and children’s poor

eating habits, it is time to revisit current practices and strengthen laws and regulations to better protect children’s health and support parents’ efforts to feed their children healthy diets.

Some argue that although companies market their products directly to children, it is up to parents to decide whether to purchase products. However, **food marketing aimed at children makes a parent’s job harder** and undermines parental authority. It forces parents to choose between being the bad guy who says “no” in order to protect their children’s health or giving in to junk-food demands to keep the peace. **It is time that food manufacturers and restaurants stopped pestering parents.**

Recommendations: Actions are needed by governments, schools, industry, parents, health professionals and others. They include **restricting the marketing to children of high-calorie, low-nutrition foods** on television, in magazines, schools and other child-directed venues. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state health departments should be funded to **sponsor aggressive media-based campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity to balance the pressures to eat low-nutrition foods.** Parents, health professionals and other community members should **urge broadcasters, food companies and restaurants to voluntarily adhere to guidelines for responsible food marketing aimed at children.**

Introduction: A Nagging Problem

“Mom, can I have this?’ That endlessly repeated, whining plea from a child can quickly make a parent’s trip to the supermarket a real pain in the neck. But it’s music to a product marketer’s ears” (Food Processing, 1997).

Purchases by Children (4 to 12 Years)*

| Category | Spending (billions \$) | Percent |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------|
| Foods & Beverages | \$7.7 | 33% |
| Toys | \$6.5 | 28% |
| Clothing | \$3.6 | 15% |
| Movies/Sports | \$2.0 | 8% |
| Video Arcades | \$1.3 | 6% |
| Other | \$2.3 | 10% |

*McNeal, 1998

Marketing aimed at children is big business since children possess and have influence over a considerable amount of money (McNeal, 1998). First, there is the money that children have in their own pockets, an amount that has been increasing. Children’s spending power doubled each decade of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and tripled in the 1990s. Children four to twelve years old spend and directly control at least \$24 billion a year in purchases. One-third of their money is spent on foods and beverages.

Second, children influence another \$500 billion in spending by their families and others (McNeal, 1998). In addition, over half of teenage girls shop for all or part

of their families’ groceries (Kraak & Pelletier, 1998b). Third, a key goal of marketing aimed at children is to shape food preferences and cultivate brand loyalty that will affect their future purchases.

Foods high in calories, saturated and trans fat, and salt and low in nutrients are aggressively marketed to children.

The time has come to reexamine current food advertising and marketing practices aimed at children because:

- ✓ Diet is a major cause of early death, disability and high health-care costs from heart disease, diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and other serious medical conditions.

- ✓ Children’s diets are poor. They are too high in calories, saturated fat, refined sugar and salt and too low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and calcium.

- ✓ Rates of obesity, and with it type 2 diabetes, in children are rising rapidly.

Parents are primarily responsible for feeding children. However, food advertising and marketing make parents’ efforts to feed their children a healthy diet more difficult. In addition, parental authority is often bypassed via direct marketing to children through television, magazines and movies and at supermarkets and schools.

“The diet presented on Saturday morning television is the antithesis of what is recommended for healthful eating for children,” according to Kotz and Story (1994).

Institutions to which parents entrust their children, such as schools, also share in the responsibility of feeding children. Efforts by schools to serve healthier foods are affected by food marketing: serving hamburgers, french fries, chips, pizza and other heavily-marketed, low-nutrition foods is a sure-fire way to get students to eat at school.

Most children lack the skills and maturity to properly consider the long-term consequences of their actions. As a society, we have numerous laws and regulations designed to protect children, ranging from mandatory school attendance to restrictions on how much they can work and when they can drive, get married and enter into contracts.

Prohibitions against cigarette and alcohol use by minors and laws mandating safety seats in cars and head protection while riding bikes are examples of regulations that safeguard against children’s inability to make good decisions regarding long- and short-term health risks.

It is incumbent upon society to foster healthy eating habits and to protect children from the influence of those who stand to profit from increasing their consumption of fatty, sugary, salty, high-calorie or low-nutrition foods. This report, *Pestering Parents*, examines the influence of food marketing on children’s food choices and health.

“The industry says parents need to decide what’s appropriate, but then they go about using every marketing ploy they can to make it harder for parents to assert their authority,” said Dianne Levin, professor of education, Wheelock College (Consumers Union, 1998b).

Children, Nutrition and Health

“Adult” Diseases in Children

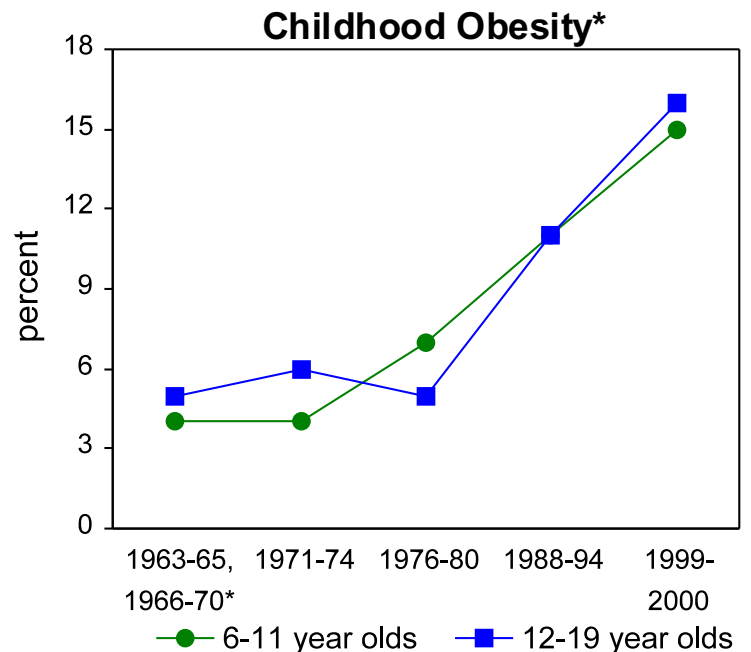
According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, poor diet and physical inactivity are leading causes of premature death, killing about 1,200 people each day – as many as tobacco (McGinnis & Foege, 1993). Diets high in calories, saturated and trans fat, sodium and added sugars and low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and calcium contribute significantly to the leading causes of death and high health-care costs: heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and osteoporosis.

In addition, poor diet can result in disabilities and loss of independence from stroke, heart disease or osteoporosis-related hip fracture or blindness and limb amputations due to diabetes.

Although those diseases are generally “adult” diseases, they have their roots in childhood, when eating habits are formed and disease processes begin. One-quarter of children ages 5 to 10 years old have high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels or other early warning sign for heart disease (Freedman et al., 1999). Autopsy studies of 15 to 19 year olds found that all had fatty streaks (the first step towards clogged arteries) in more than one artery, and about 10% had advanced fibrous plaques (PDAY, 1993).

Childhood Obesity. Obesity is one of the most pressing health problems facing the country. While the rates were relatively stable in the 1960s and 1970s, at around 5% for both children and adolescents, they increased rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s (see graph) (Ogden et al., 2002). In the last two decades, obesity rates doubled in children and tripled in adolescents.

The negative health consequences of obesity are already evident in children. Sixty percent of overweight children suffer from high blood pressure, high



blood cholesterol levels and/or high levels of insulin in the blood (a precursor to diabetes) (Freedman et al., 1999). Type 2 diabetes can no longer be called “adult onset” diabetes because of rising rates in children. In a study conducted in Cincinnati, the rate of new cases of type 2 diabetes in adolescents

increased 10-fold between 1982 and 1994 (Pinhas-Hamiel et al., 1996).

Diabetes can lead to other life-long health complications, such as heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, limb amputations and blindness, as well as pregnancy complications and increased deaths from flu and pneumonia (CDC, 2002). Each year, diabetes causes blindness in 12,000 to 24,000 people, kidney failure in 38,000, and leg and foot amputations in 82,000 people (CDC, 2002). As the number of young people with type 2 diabetes increases, diabetic complications will develop at younger ages (likely in their 30s to 40s). Childhood obesity and diabetes can be prevented through good dietary and physical activity habits.

Obese children are twice as likely as non-obese children to become obese adults (Serdula et al., 1993) and thus, are more likely to suffer from the health complications associated with adult obesity and overweight, which include diabetes, heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, stroke and psychological disorders such as depression (NIDDK, 2002; USDHHS, 2001).

Costs of Poor Diet and Obesity. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), healthier diets could save the country at least \$71 billion per year in medical costs, lost productivity and lost lives (Frazao, 1999). Overall, obesity costs American families, businesses and governments about \$117 billion in health-care and related costs each year (USDHHS, 2001). From 1979 to 1999, annual hospital costs for treating obesity-related

diseases in children rose three-fold, from \$35 million to \$127 million (Wang & Dietz, 2002).

Children's Diets

Poor Eating Habits Start Young.

The last thing children need is more encouragement – through food marketing – to eat calorie-dense, low-nutrition foods. Only 2% of children eat a healthy diet consistent with the Food Guide Pyramid (Munoz et al., 1997). Children's diets generally are too high in fat, saturated fat and sodium and too low in fiber (Lin et al., 1996).

Children's saturated fat intake was unchanged between 1989 and 1996. The number of grams of saturated fat consumed stayed constant at about 28 to 29 grams. While the percentage of calories consumed from saturated fat decreased from 13.0% to 11.7% (recommended intake is 10%), that is due to increased calorie intake. Only 16% of children meet the dietary recommendation for saturated fat intake (USDA, 2001a).

Children Are Eating More Calories. Between 1989 and 1996, children's calorie intake increased by approximately 80 to 230 extra calories per day (depending on the child's age and activity level) (USDA, 2001a; IOM, 2002). The increases in calorie intake were driven, in part, by increased intakes of foods and beverages high in added sugars (USDA, 2001a).

Children Are Snacking More. The average number of snacks eaten per day by teens increased from 1.6 to 2.0 between 1977 and 1996. Snacks

provide approximately 610 calories to teens' diets each day, up from 460 calories in 1977 (Jahns, 2001). Snacking would not be a problem if the snacks were healthful, but too often they are not.

Soft Drinks Contribute to Children's Rising Calorie Intake and Displace Healthy Foods. Nationally, carbonated soda consumption doubled over the last 30 years, from 24 to 55 gallons of soft drinks per person per year between 1970 and 2001 (Prince, 2002; Putnam and Allshouse, 1999). Soft drink consumption by children increased 40% between 1989 and 1996, from 1.0 to 1.4 servings per day (USDA, 2001a). 56% to 85% of children drink soda each day (depending on age and gender) (USDA, 2001b).

Children who drink soft drinks consume more calories (about 55 to 245 per day) than kids who do not drink soft drinks (Mrdjenovic & Levitsky, 2003; Harnack et al., 1999; Guenther, 1986) and are more likely to gain weight or become overweight (Mrdjenovic & Levitsky, 2003; Ludwig et al., 2001).

Consumption of **soft drinks can displace healthy foods** like low-fat milk and 100% juice from children's diets (Mrdjenovic & Levitsky, 2003; Cullen et al., 2002; Ballew et al., 2000; Bowman, 1999; Harnack et al., 1999; Lewis et al., 1992; Guenther, 1986). Only 30% of children consume the recommended number of servings of milk each day, down from 40% in 1989 (USDA, 2001a). About 15% eat the recommended amount of fruit.

Milk is an important source of calcium to help children build strong bones. Maximum bone mass for women is acquired by age 20 (NOF, 2001). Building strong bones in childhood and adolescence is essential to preventing osteoporosis later in life. In addition, people who eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day have half the cancer risk of those who eat fewer than two servings per day (Block et al., 1992).

Eating Out Negatively Affects Children's Diets. Restaurant foods are an increasingly important part of children's diets. In 1970, Americans spent just 26% of their food dollars on restaurant meals and other meals prepared outside their homes (Lin et al., 1999). Today, we spend almost half (46%) our food dollars at restaurants and other food-service establishments (NRA, 2002). Children eat about a third (32%) of their total calorie intake from away-from-home foods (Lin et al., 2001). The proportion of meals children ate out that were purchased in fast-food restaurants increased from 1 in 10 meals in 1977 to 1 in 3 meals in 1996 (Lin et al., 2001).

Children typically eat almost twice as many calories when they eat at a restaurant (770 calories) compared to a meal at home (420 calories) (Zoumas-Morse et al., 2001). In addition, the foods that children eat from fast-food and other restaurants are higher in fat and saturated fat and lower in fiber, iron, calcium and cholesterol than foods from home (Lin et al., 1996).

Children's Exposure to Food Advertising and Other Marketing

Amount of Advertising

Food (i.e., food, beverages, sweets and restaurants) ranks as the third-most-advertised category of products in the U.S. (*Advertising Age*, 2002). Only cars and retail/ department/discount stores are advertised more. According to USDA, food is heavily advertised because 1) the food sector is large (equal to about 12% of consumer income), 2) food is a repeat-purchase item and 3) food is highly branded. Thus, there is great potential to influence consumer decisions and tremendous competition between companies (Gallo, 1999).

Food advertising and promotional expenditures were \$26 billion in 2000 (Eltizak, 2001). That is a **50% increase above what was spent in 1990**. Fifty percent of food advertising and promotions is by manufacturers, 25% by food service and 15% by retailers.

In 1980, when companies realized that children's disposable income and influence on family spending was on the rise, marketing to children began to mushroom. Television advertising aimed at children increased 10-fold between 1983 and 1997, from \$100 million to \$1 billion (Lauro, 1999).

Overall marketing and advertising aimed at children increased from \$6.9 billion in 1992 to \$12.7 billion in 1997 to \$15 billion in 2002 (McNeal, 2003; Lauro, 1999; McNeal, 1992).

Marketing figures include television and print advertising, in-school marketing, sales promotions, public relations, packaging design and product placements in movies (for all marketing aimed at children, not just food).

Average Television Viewing Time by Children Per Day*

| By age: | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 2-4 yr | 1 hour, 59 min. |
| 5-7 yr | 2 hours |
| 8-13 yr | 3 hours, 37 min. |
| 14-18 yr | 2 hours, 43 min. |
| By race (2-18 years): | |
| White | 2 hours, 22 min. |
| Black | 3 hours, 56 min. |
| Hispanic | 3 hours, 31 min. |

*Kaiser, 1999

Media Exposure

The average American child (2 to 18 years old) spends about five-and-a-half hours using media per day (Kaiser, 1999). Television is, by far, the dominant medium, with the average child watching 2 hours and 46 minutes per day (see table on page 9). Even infants watch television in the U.S.: 17% of babies less than one year old and 48% of those between one and two years old watch one or more hours of television per day (Certain & Kahn, 2002). Virtually all children live in homes with a television (99%), 74% have cable or satellite TV, 69% have a computer and 45% have Internet access (Kaiser, 1999). There are three televisions, three radios, two VCRs and one computer in the home of the average American child. The television is on "most of the time" in 42% of children's homes, and is on during meals in 58%

of children's homes. Half (53%) of children have a television in their bedroom. In addition, many young children have televisions: one third (32%) of 2- to 7-year-olds have a television in their bedroom.

The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages television viewing for children under 2 years and recommends no more than 1 to 2 hours a day of total media (television, video games and other entertainment media) time for other children (AAP, 2001). Increasing the number of children who watch television two or fewer hours per school day is also a national health goal of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2000).

Children see about 21 commercials on television per hour, and most commercials are about 30 seconds long (Taras & Gage, 1995). Thus, **children view an average of 3½ hours of television commercials per week, and each year they spend the equivalent of a week watching TV ads.**

Food Advertising

A substantial proportion of television commercials aimed at children is for food. Studies of weekday afternoon and Saturday morning programs found that **half of all ads during children's television shows are for food** (Gamble & Cotugna, 1999; Consumers International, 1996; Taras & Gage, 1995; Kotz & Story, 1994). A study of prime-time

television shows viewed heavily by 2- to 11-year-olds found that a quarter of the advertisements are for foods and beverages (Byrd-Bredbenner & Grasso, 2000).

Types of Food Advertised.

Overall, most of food advertising is for low-nutrition foods, such as convenience foods, fast food, candy, snack foods and soft drinks (see table) (Gallo, 1999). Only 2% of advertising by food manufacturers is for fruits, vegetables, grains and beans combined, the foods that should make up the bulk of a healthy diet. **The overwhelming majority of food ads aimed at children is for foods and beverages high in sugars, fat and/or salt**, such as sugary cereals, sweetened drinks, fast food, candy and chips (Gamble & Cotugna, 1999; Consumers International, 1996; Taras & Gage, 1995; Kotz & Story, 1994). Few to no ads are for fruits and vegetables. Less than 10% of the ads are for foods low in sugar, fat and salt (Taras & Gage, 1995). "The diet presented on Saturday morning television is the antithesis of

Advertising Expenditures by Food Manufacturers*

| Product Category | Advertising Expenditures | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------|
| | (millions) | Share (%) |
| Prepared, convenience foods | \$1,563 | 22 |
| Candy & snacks | \$1,095 | 15 |
| Alcoholic beverages | \$1,082 | 15 |
| Soft drinks | \$702 | 10 |
| Cooking products, seasonings | \$675 | 9 |
| Coffee, tea, juices | \$625 | 9 |
| Dairy products | \$505 | 7 |
| Bakery goods | \$408 | 6 |
| Meat, poultry, fish | \$210 | 3 |
| Fruits, vegetables, grains, beans | \$159 | 2 |
| General promotions | \$50 | 1 |

* For all foods, not just ads aimed at children. Gallo, 1999.

what is recommended for healthful eating for children,” wrote Kotz and Story (1994). The researchers found that half (50%) of the advertised foods fell into the fats, oils and sweets category of the USDA food guide pyramid. Although 43% of the ads were for foods from the grains group (the largest food group of the pyramid), more than 60% of those were for high-sugar cereals.¹ Only a small percentage of the advertisements were for foods from the dairy category (4%, half of which were for chocolate milk) or the meat/protein food group (2%, all of which were for chicken nuggets). The remaining food ads were for fast-food restaurants (11%) and frozen meals (2%), which were largely high in fat. None of the ads were for fruits or vegetables.

¹ High-sugar cereals were those with more than 20% sugar by weight, except for those in which sugar was the primary ingredient by weight, which were included in the fats, oils and sweets category, in accordance with USDA Child Nutrition Program criteria.

Government Programs to Encourage Healthy Eating

While low-nutrition foods are aggressively marketed to children, children are rarely encouraged by marketers to choose healthy foods. Moreover, federal and state governments invest few resources in promoting healthy eating to children. Overall, funding for nutrition education pales in comparison to the ad budgets for low-nutrition foods (see table).

The National Cancer Institute's 5 A Day program, which promotes fruit and vegetable intake, has a Fiscal Year 2003 communications budget of \$3.5 million dollars and little of that is directed at children (Green, 2003). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity has a FY 2003 budget of \$34 million. While CDC and the states it funds have activities to encourage healthy eating by children and a national media campaign that promotes physical activity to middle-school-age children (funded at \$51 million for FY 2003), CDC does not have a coordinated, national communications effort to promote healthy eating to children. USDA spent \$10 million on school-based nutrition education for children (the Team Nutrition program) in FY 2003.

Food Advertising vs. Nutrition Education

| | Budget (millions) |
|--|-------------------|
| Nutrition Programs* | |
| CDC, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity | \$34 |
| USDA, Team Nutrition | \$10 |
| NCI, 5 A Day program | \$4 |
| Food Advertising** | |
| Fast Food | |
| McDonald's | \$665 |
| Burger King | \$385 |
| Wendy's | \$242 |
| Pizza Hut | \$152 |
| Candy | |
| M&M's | \$74 |
| Snickers | \$32 |
| Reeses candy | \$29 |
| Kit Kat | \$14 |
| Soft Drinks | |
| Coca-Cola and Diet Coke | \$209 |
| Pepsi and Diet Pepsi | \$173 |
| Gatorade sports drinks | \$94 |
| Sprite | \$84 |
| Sunny Delight fruit drink | \$24 |
| Other | |
| Kellogg cereals | \$284 |
| Betty Crocker foods | \$72 |
| Jell-O desserts | \$56 |
| Pringles | \$29 |
| Ruffles potato chips | \$28 |
| Doritos | \$27 |
| Breyers ice cream | \$12 |

*Budgets for FY 2003

**Budgets for 2000 (measured media only) (Ad Age, 2001)

Ways and Means of Marketing Food to Children

Television

A wide variety of media are used to advertise and market food to children. However, as discussed above, children spend more time watching television than with any other medium. Television is also the dominant medium used to advertise food, capturing 70% of all food-advertising dollars (see table), and probably the food-advertising dollars spent to reach children.

Marketers reach children through kid-oriented channels like Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network, as well as during child-directed programming on broadcast and cable stations. They also use “non-commercial” stations to influence children.

though use of company logos and mascots or spokescharacters are allowed (PBS, 2003). Sponsorship spots during children’s programs on PBS include those for Chuck E. Cheese’s restaurants, McDonald’s, Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes cereal, Post Alpha-Bits cereal and Franco-American Spaghetti Os.

Food Advertising Spending by Medium*

| Medium | Spending (in millions) | % Total† |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Television | \$6,618 | 71% |
| <i>National television</i> | \$3,116 | |
| <i>Spot television</i> | \$2,127 | |
| <i>Cable television</i> | \$1,375 | |
| Print | \$1,445 | 16% |
| <i>Magazine</i> | \$1,255 | |
| <i>Newspaper</i> | \$132 | |
| <i>Sunday magazine</i> | \$58 | |
| Radio | \$355 | 4% |
| Outdoor | \$256 | 3% |
| Total (measured)‡ | \$9,295 | |

**Advertising Age*, 2002. Figures are for all food ads, not just those aimed at children.

†Some media, such as internet and Yellow Pages, are excluded.

‡Includes only paid advertising expenditures. Does not include PR, coupons and other forms of promotion.

Advertising on “Commercial-Free” Children’s Television. There is no children’s television that parents can count on to be free of advertising. Even public television, i.e., PBS, runs advertisements. PBS’s ad guidelines allow only for “brief, generic, value-neutral descriptions” of a product and do not permit the product to be shown,

When it was launched in the early 1980s, the Disney Channel did not accept any outside advertising. In 2002, that changed, and Disney began to air commercials for McDonald’s at the beginning and end of programs during its preschool program block, Playhouse Disney. Though Disney calls the spots sponsorships, rather than

advertisements, they are part of an extensive joint marketing arrangement between the two companies that includes theme parks and movie tie-ins with McDonald's food (WSJ, 2002).

Magazines

In 2001, there were 250 magazines published for children and adolescents, up from 130 in 1989 (Magazine Publishers of America, 2003a).² They include *Nickelodeon* magazine, *Disney Adventures*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Seventeen*, *CosmoGirl* and *Teen People*. Most of the popular children's magazines carry advertising (see table) In addition, children's magazines include many hidden advertisements – ads presented as games, puzzles, comics and editorials (Kraak & Pelletier, 1998a).

| <u>Publication</u> | <u>Circulation</u> | <u>Number of ad pages per month[†]</u> | <u>Ad revenue per month[†]</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| <i>Seventeen</i> | 2,432,000 | 110 | \$9,453,000 |
| <i>CosmoGirl</i> | 1,055,000 | 87 | \$6,850,000 |
| <i>Teen People</i> | 1,652,000 | 76 | \$6,013,000 |
| <i>Nickelodeon</i> | 1,022,000 | 31 | \$1,904,000 |
| <i>Sport Illustrated for Kids</i> | 774,000 | 30 | \$2,096,000 |
| <i>Disney Adventures</i> | 1,117,000 | 20 | \$1,240,000 |
| <i>Boys' Life</i> | 1,410,000 | 11 | \$405,000 |

*Magazine Publishers of America, 2003b; Ad Age, 2003. [†]Based on figures for May 2003.

² While the reported number of children's magazines decreased to 180 in 2002, the 2002 number is an outlier from a clear trend of the number of youth magazines increasing between 1989 and 2001.

Food Availability

One key goal of manufacturers, restaurants and marketers is to ensure that their products are never far from children's reach. With over 420,000 restaurants and other food service outlets in the country, there are opportunities to eat out almost everywhere children go – shopping malls, gas stations, movie theaters, highway rest stops, sporting events, etc. (US Census Bureau, 1997). That includes approximately 174,000 kid-oriented fast-food outlets. There are vending machines in approximately 1.4 million schools, worksites, colleges, hospitals, public buildings and other locations (Lavay, 2002).

Food Marketing in Schools

Marketing in schools has become big business. Businesses see it as an opportunity to make direct sales and to cultivate brand loyalty. They realize that schools are a great place to reach children, since almost all attend school and they spend a large proportion of their waking hours there. School-based marketing also adds credibility to marketing activities by associating the company's name and product with trusted schools or teachers.

Nineteen states have laws or regulations that address commercial activities in schools, but just five of those are comprehensive in nature (GAO, 2000). Only 12% of schools prohibit the sale of junk foods³ out of vending machines,

³CDC defines junk foods as foods that provide calories primarily through fats or added sugars and have minimal amounts of vitamins and minerals.

school stores, snack bars and other venues outside of the school cafeteria (CDC, 2000b). Some have defended the sales of low-nutrition foods at schools by saying that if schools do not sell these foods, children will just buy them off campus. However, 75% of senior high schools, 90% of middle/junior high schools and 95% of elementary schools have closed-campus policies (CDC, 2002b).

National PTA guidelines state that "public schools must not be used to promote commercial interest" (National PTA, 2002). The National Association of State Boards of Education's (NASBE) policy on school-business relationships states that "selling or providing access to a captive audience in the classroom for commercial purposes is exploitation and a violation of the public trust" (NASBE, 1998).

Many companies are taking advantage of schools' financial difficulties by offering marketing dollars as a way for schools to bridge budget gaps.

Commercial activities in schools include: 1) product sales, such as food sales out of vending machines, exclusive soft drink contracts, fundraising activities or receipt rebate programs; 2) direct advertising, such as ads on vending machines, scoreboards, posters, school publications, book covers, banners in gymnasiums and Channel One; 3) free product samples; 4) indirect advertising, such as corporate-sponsored educational materials and teacher training, contests in which children receive product prizes, incentive

programs and corporate gifts in which the donor benefits commercially; and 5) market research, such as student surveys or panels and tracking of students' Internet activities (GAO, 2000).⁴

Product Sales in Schools. The General Accounting Office (GAO) found that "product sales – primarily the sale of soft drinks by schools or districts under exclusive contracts and short-term fundraising sales – were the most common and lucrative type of commercial activity at the schools visited" (GAO, 2000). Vending machines, school stores, canteens or snack bars are in almost half of elementary schools, three-quarters of middle schools and virtually all high schools (see table) (CDC, 2000b). The most common items sold are soft drinks, fruit drinks that are not 100% juice, and salty snack foods and sweet baked goods that are not low fat. Vending machines not only dispense high-calorie, low-nutrition foods, but the fronts and sides of the machines often are ads in and of themselves.

Of all product sales in schools, exclusive soft-drink contracts are the fastest-growing ventures (GAO, 2000). Half of school districts have contracts with soft drink companies (CDC, 2000b). However, the conditions and profitability of exclusive soft drink contracts vary considerably from district to district (GAO, 2000). Though some contracts appear to be lucrative, the funds raised usually represent only a small fraction of a district's overall budget. On average,

⁴A list of companies that advertise in schools is available from Consumers Union at <<http://www.consumersunion.org/other/sellingkids/advertiserlist.htm>>.

Schools with Vending Machines, Stores, Snack Bars*

| <u>School Level</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Elementary | 43% |
| Middle/Junior High | 74% |
| High School | 98% |

*CDC, 2000b

contracts generate from \$3 to \$30 per student per year, and even the most lucrative contract provides less than 0.5% of a school district's budget (GAO, 2000).

Exclusive soft drink contracts usually include provisions under which the district or school earns more revenue the more soft drinks they sell. About 80% of districts receive a percentage of sales and 63% receive incentives tied to sales (CDC, 2000b). Such arrangements create a situation in which it is in the financial interest of the school administration for students to drink more soda and can lead schools to promote soft drinks to children and make them more available (in more locations or for longer periods of time during the school day).

The percentage of public schools, participating in the National School Lunch Program, that offer **brand-name fast food** rose six-fold (from 2% to 13%) between the 1990 and 1995 school years (GAO, 1996). By 2000, brand-name fast food was offered in 20% of schools (CDC, 2000c).

Fundraising by student groups, parent-teacher organizations, booster clubs and athletic programs often involves the sale of low-nutrition foods. About 80% of schools sell foods or beverages for fundraising (CDC, 2002b). Of those schools, 76% sell chocolate candy, 67% sell baked goods that are not low fat, and 63% sell non-chocolate candy.

Direct Advertising in Schools. The GAO (2000) found that the most visible and prevalent advertisements in schools are soft drink ads (including on beverage vending machines) and corporate logos on scoreboards. Other advertising in schools is on book covers, posters, school buses, school calendars, school newspapers and printed programs for school events. A survey of California high schools found that 39% of districts had fast food and beverage ads on posters, 28% had ads on scoreboards or signs, and only 13% prohibited advertising (15% of districts did not respond) (Craypo et al., 2002).

Channel One is a for-profit enterprise that provides electronic equipment (a satellite dish, wiring, VCRs and televisions in each classroom) to schools in exchange for schools showing students (in at least 80% of classrooms on 90% of school days) a 12-minute news program, including 2 minutes of commercials (GAO, 2000). Channel One promotional materials boast that it has “television’s largest teen audience” (Channel One News, 2002), with more than 8 million viewers in over 12,000 middle, junior and high schools (Channel One, 2003). However, public pressure has kept Channel One out of New York public schools.

Channel One promotes unhealthy eating habits to children by airing ads for low-nutrition foods, including Pepsi, Snapple, MUG root beer, Gatorade, Snickers candy bars and Starburst candy. Channel One adds credibility to advertising because it is shown in school, and adds to children’s television viewing time, which already exceeds recommended levels. In addition, Channel One cuts into instruction time. Class time lost to Channel One has been estimated to cost taxpayers \$1.8 billion a year (Reid & Gedissman, 2000), with 6 hours of class time devoted to advertising each school year.⁵

Channel One positions itself with educators as a way to “empower young people by keeping them informed of current events” (Channel One, 2002). However, the company’s sales tape paints a different picture (Channel One, 1996). The tape states that “Millions of teenagers are all over the place but there’s one place where you can get to them.” Then, the tape cuts to children watching Channel One in school. Several people on the tape, including teachers, explain how much the kids pay attention to the commercials.

School Contests, Coupons and Incentives. Another way that food companies market their products to children is by sponsoring contests and giving away coupons in schools. ✕ Kraft sponsored a contest in which elementary-school “kids from across the country sing the praises of hot dogs and bologna” for the chance to win

⁵Based on a 180-day school year.

\$10,000 for their school's music program (Kraft Foods, 2002).⁶

✘ With Campbell's Labels for Education program, students collect labels from Campbell products and redeem them for school supplies, musical instruments or food service equipment (Campbell Soup Company, 2003). However, the program requires students' families to buy almost \$15,000 worth of soup to earn one stock pot for the school kitchen (12,400 required labels from cans of soup that cost about \$1.20 each) or \$2,500 worth of soup to get a heavy duty stapler (2,100 labels).

✘ The Pepsi Notes contest provided musical instruments to schools in exchange for note symbols collected from Pepsi and Frito-Lay packages (PepsiCo, 2002).

✘ Pizza Hut has a school-based program that rewards elementary school students for reading a required number of books by giving them a coupon for a free Personal Pan Pizza (Pizza Hut, 2003). Not only does this program use a low-nutrition food to reward academic achievement, but it often results in other family members eating – and paying for their own meals – at the restaurant (which, of course, is a goal of the promotion).

✘ The Krispy Kreme Good Grades program offers elementary school children one doughnut for each "A" they earn on their report card (and up to six

doughnuts per grading period) (Krispy Kreme, 2003).

Only Alabama and the District of Columbia prohibit the use of food to reward children for good behavior or academic performance, and seven other states (Alaska, Arkansas, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Wisconsin and Wyoming) discourage this practice (CDC, 2001a).

Corporate-Sponsored Educational Materials. Consumers Union found that 80% of the 77 industry-sponsored educational materials they reviewed promoted the company's agenda or consumption of their product(s) or included biased or incomplete information (Consumers Union, 1998a).

Several food companies provide educational materials for children. The content of McDonald's *What's On Your Plate* video (McDonald's, 2002b) and the National Dairy Council's *Pyramid Cafe Student Workbook* are not overly commercial or misleading (National Dairy Council, 1998). However, the Dairy Council's workbook emphasizes milk over the other food groups by consistently listing the milk food group first and by showcasing only dairy foods, including the "Got Milk" ad slogan, on the back page of the workbook. The National Pork Board's *Learning about Pork* coloring book teaches children that pork is "an important part of a well-balanced diet" and that "healthy pigs are happy" (National Pork Board, 1996). Other materials do not seek to teach nutrition directly, but aim to cultivate brand identity and loyalty. Coca-Cola and McDonald's co-sponsor the *Little*

⁶In July 2003, Kraft Foods announced that it will no longer market its products in schools. However, school-based marketing was not a major marketing venue for Kraft.

Known Black History Facts Education Kit, and McDonald's has materials on subjects ranging from fire safety to suicide prevention (McDonald's, 2002b). For grades K-5, teachers can call their local McDonald's restaurant and arrange for "inspirational lessons...hosted by Ronald McDonald."

Schools in California are prohibited by law from using materials containing corporate logos, commercial brand names and products unless the use of the logo, brand name or product is necessary for educational purposes (California Education Code, 2003).

Toys, Books, Clothing and Other Products with Brand Logos

Many manufacturers sell toys, books and apparel that are advertisements for their products. Dr. Marion Nestle, chair of Nutrition and Food Studies at New York University, calls these "ads you buy" (Nestle, 2002). The Coca-Cola website sells T-shirts, toys, games, sports gear and other child-oriented products with the Coca-Cola standard logo and/or polar bear mascot (Coca-Cola, 2002). The McDonald's Kids' Stuff website sells tee-shirts (including in sizes for 2 to 4 year olds), a "Happy Meal Guys" lunch box, soft dolls representing a hamburger, fries and a drink, and the Let's Go to McDonald's Game (McDonald's, 2002a). Kellogg sells dolls of its cereal icons (Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam, etc.), as well as toys, clothing, cereal bowls, spoons and snack containers (Kellogg, 2002).

McDonald's Fun Time! Restaurant Playset comes with a food counter and miniature fries, burgers, pies and sodas,

all emblazoned with the golden arches. Barbie, dressed as a McDonald's clerk, and Kelly, shown eating a Happy Meal, are sold separately. Heinz's Sizzlin' BBQ Play Set comes with a play grill, food and Heinz-branded ketchup, relish, pickles and BBQ sauce. M&M's Minis serve as the fuselage for Hasbro's Aircraft Candy Copter (toy helicopter).

There are reading and counting books for toddlers and young children centered around brand-name foods. Books include *Kellogg's Froot Loops! Counting Fun Book* and the *M&M's Brand Birthday Book*. Reading the *Oreo Cookie Counting Book* involves eating 10 Oreos, which would provide 535 calories. The M&M's and Froot Loops books include cut-out circles in which to place the food. There also are children's books based on Skittles, Hershey Kisses, Necco Sweetheart candies, Cheerios, Sun-Maid raisins and Pepperidge Farm Goldfish. For slightly older children, there are *Reeses's Pieces: Count by Fives*, *Skittles Riddles Math* and the *Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar Fractions Book*

"It's not that these (snack-brand) books resemble advertising - they are advertising," stated Kate Klimo, publisher of Random House's Children's Books Division (Kirkpatrick, 2000).

Snack-brand children's books reinforce brand identities and bring additional marketing into children's lives. Although many children are already consuming too many calories, these books create

additional opportunities for children to eat (often low-nutrition foods) by making eating a part of reading.

Websites

Many food companies market their products to children on the Internet and direct children to their websites through ads and product packaging. Through on-line games and activities, the websites can provide repeated brand exposure and positive interaction with a brand to help cultivate brand identity and loyalty.

There is little separation between advertising and content on food company websites geared toward children. Food products, logos and company spokescharacters are built into the games and other website content. Unlike television commercials, which can be ignored by muting the television or flipping channels, children are completely absorbed while playing an “advergame.” Advergames on food company websites may be short compared to computer or console games, but they are long for advertisements (Edwards, 2003).

Nabiscoworld.com features more than 50 games, puzzles, screen savers and sweepstakes, each sponsored by a brand of Nabisco’s cookies and snacks.⁷ Some of the games are aimed at toddlers such as *Where’s Teddy?*, a game where toddlers find hidden Teddy Graham cookies (Nabisco, 2003a). In the *Oreo Adventure* game, when children find the golden cookie jars on their journey to the Temple of the Golden Oreo, their “health” is reset to 100% (Nabisco, 2003b). If children click on the

⁷ Based on a count of site map links at <http://www.nabiscoworld.com> on May 25, 2003.

Watch the Videos link on the Chips Ahoy section of the Nabisco website, they will see not movie clips, but rather television commercials for chips Ahoy! cookies (Nabisco, 2003c). Kraft Food’s Candystand.com includes numerous advergames and sweepstakes promoting Life Savers candy and receives more than 1 million unique visitors a month (Edwards, 2003). The Hershey Foods’ site has games, puzzles, recipes and a quiz to test children’s knowledge of Hershey’s ads and products (Hershey Foods, 2003). The Kellogg site includes a “nutrition camp” hosted by sugary cereal icons such as Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam and Dig’em, the Smacks frog (Kellogg Company, 2003). The site teaches children that calories are “the action heroes of the food world” and that “Kellogg’s cereals are loaded with carbohydrates – your body’s preferred source of energy.” The McDonald’s kids’ website has an alphabet game, coloring activities, quizzes and riddles (McDonald’s Corporation, 2002c).

Stealth Advertising: Product Placement

Food companies also market products to children through product placement (paying a fee or donating products to be incorporated into movies and television programs). In the 2002 blockbuster *Spider-Man*, the hero used his newly-discovered web-spinning power to retrieve a Dr. Pepper. A Dr. Pepper spokesman said, “We felt it would attract audiences of all ages, and especially teens and young adults” (Elliott, 2002). A futuristic-looking Big Mac, fries and soda, featuring the McDonald’s arches, pops out of the

Cortez children's lunch box in *Spy Kid's 2*, and Heinz ketchup appears in Warner Bros.' *Scooby Doo* movie. Canada Dry vending machines appeared on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (though in reality, Canada Dry vending machines do not exist) (Vista Group, 2002b).

Children are unlikely to recognize product placement as advertising because it is an integral part of a movie or program and thus, children may be less skeptical of, and perhaps more susceptible to, it than to more obvious forms of advertising. Placement agencies claim that product placements may have more credibility than paid advertising and can provide implied endorsements when an actor uses a product (Vista Group, 2002a).

In a study of adults, Gupta and Lord (1998) found that prominent product placements were remembered better than advertisements of similar length, though advertisements were more memorable than subtle product placements.

Other studies also have found that product placements are remembered, and one found that placements increase reported intention to purchase featured brands (Karrh, 1998).

Product placements create and reinforce social norms regarding the product. They also undermine parental responsibility and control because they cannot be skipped over and avoided. However, some argue that brand placements are a necessary component of programs and movies to make them realistic, because brands are a part of everyday life.

The surge in sales of Reese's Pieces (which was not a paid product placement) after the original release of *E.T.* sparked a significant increase in product placements (Beck, 2001). *Kidscreen*, an online marketing magazine, wrote, "Product placement in movies, particularly in kids' and teen films, is now at an all-time high and has become a mini-industry unto itself" (Beck, 2001).

"Placements are shown in the context of the show. They cannot be skipped over like print ads, 'zapped' by VCR users, or ignored by viewers," Vista Group, a product placement agency (2002a).

The cost of product placements in movies varies depending on how long and how prominently the product is displayed, and whether a character in the movie interacts with it (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). However, in many cases, especially for television, the client provides the legal rights to use a product and/or extra product to the studio, rather than a monetary fee.

Television stations are required by the Federal Communications Commission to disclose product placements for which money or services are either directly or indirectly received or promised, notifying the audience that the product was sponsored, paid for or provided and by whom (FCC, 2002). However, such disclosures would be in small print at the end of a television show and are unlikely to be seen, especially by children. In addition, the

policy does not require that a payment made to an agency for a product placement be made public.

A study of prime time programs (which were not all aimed at children) on the four major broadcast television stations (ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC) found about 10 brand appearances per half hour program for situational comedies and 58 brand appearances per half hour of sports programming (Avery & Ferraro, 2000).

Kid's Clubs

Unlike real clubs where children come together around common interests to have fun and make friends, kid's clubs or birthday clubs hosted by food companies act largely as vehicles for advertising to children and sending them magazines (often with ads), coupons or catalogs (Consumers Union, 1990). Burger King and Blimpie Subs and Salads have kid's clubs, and California Pizza Kitchen, Baskin Robbins and Denny's restaurants sponsor birthday clubs. The Blimpie Important Person (BIP) Club e-mails children regarding "coupon distribution, when (their) commercials will be airing on television, and all other Blimpie information" (Blimpie, 2003).

By joining the Baskin Robbins' Birthday Club, a child 12 or under is given a coupon for a free kids-sized ice cream cone on his birthday (as well as other offers from Baskin Robbins, Dunkin' Donuts and Togo's throughout the year). Denny's restaurant offers a free kid's entree and sundae for children's birthdays, but kids can only get their "free" meal with the purchase of a

regularly priced adult entree (Denny's, 2003).

Packaging and Placement in Supermarkets and Other Retail Stores

Even if parents manage to limit their children's exposure to television advertising, there is a great deal of in-store food marketing aimed at children. Food manufacturers pay grocery stores "slotting" and "pay-to-stay" fees in order to get and keep good shelf space (Dimitri, 2001; Federal Trade Commission, 2001). That is one reason for the large amount of space devoted to cereals, chips and candy in grocery stores and why children's products are placed so that kids can see and reach them without assistance from a parent.

Food Packaging. The design of food packaging is carefully studied by food companies and research firms.

Grocery stores are "designed for kids. That's why you always see a kid tugging at someone's arm saying 'Buy this,'" said Greg Kahn, founder of Kahn Research Group (ElBoghdady, 2003).

Cartoon or Other Characters on Food Packages

| <u>Company</u> | <u>Product</u> | <u>Characters</u> |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Nabisco | Dora the Explorer Teddy Grahams cookies | Dora the Explorer |
| Edy's | Fish 'n Chips ice cream | Characters from Disney's <i>Finding Nemo</i> |
| General Mills | fruit snacks | Elmo, Snow White, Little Mermaid, Cinderella |
| ConAgra Foods | Kid Cuisine frozen dinners | Powerpuff Girls, Fairly Odd Parents, Wild Thornberrys, Rugrats |
| Nabisco | Ritz crackers, Oreo cookies | Hulk |
| Ore Ida | Funky Fries | Jimmy Neutron |
| Kraft | Macaroni & Cheese | SpongeBob Squarepants |
| Kellogg | Spidey-Berry flavored Pop-Tarts and Spider-Man cereal | Spider-Man |
| Kellogg | cereals | Disney's Buzz Lightyear, Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh and the <i>Lion King's</i> Pumba, Timon and Simba |

Companies design their packages to stand out and appeal to children, carefully choosing the color, the product name, ease of use of the packaging, portion size and use of cartoon or other characters (Food Processing, 1997). Red has been shown to be a powerful color, signaling sweetness and/or excitement, and is used for the packaging of products such as Coca-Cola and Kellogg's Froot Loops (Lindner, 1999).

The fun and attention-getting colors of Heinz' Blastin' Green and Funky Purple

ketchup are, in part, responsible for the growth of Heinz market share since 2000 (McGinn, 2003). The company also credits easier-to-squeeze packaging as important to the products' success (Eig, 2001). Easier-to-use packaging appeals to children who often prefer to serve themselves and want greater independence and control during meals.

Many companies feature cartoon or other movie or television characters on their product packages to increase sales to children (see table). Food companies

also design their own “spokes-characters” to sell products to children.

Mars uses the M&M’s characters, which the company claims are more popular than Bart Simpson or Mickey Mouse (Mars, 2002). Kellogg has Tony the Tiger, Snap, Crackle and Pop, Toucan Sam and Dig’em the frog to sell its cereal. General Mills uses the Pillsbury Doughboy and the Trix rabbit. Frito-Lay created Chester Cheetah to help sell Cheetos cheese snacks. And of course, McDonald’s has the clown, Ronald McDonald.

Branding Children: Marketing Techniques

In addition to using a variety of different types of media and approaches to reach children as described above, food companies use a variety of techniques to entice children to buy or nag their parents for food products. These techniques range from tie-ins with movies, television characters or athletes to offering toys or premiums with foods to contests.

“Studies have shown that the mere appearance of a character with a product can significantly alter a child’s perception of the product,” concluded the Children’s Advertising Review Unit, the self-regulatory organization of the advertising industry (2002).

Spokes-characters, Tie-ins and Celebrity Endorsements

Advertising and marketing aimed at children often utilize television and movie characters, star musicians and athletes, taking advantage of children’s familiarity with, affection for or admiration of them. Younger children may not understand that spokespeople are paid to promote products, and small children may not even understand that cartoon characters do not really exist. Using characters from movies and television shows also blurs the line between programs and advertising. As noted above, there are numerous examples of tie-ins on food product packages. Coca-Cola’s tie-in to the Harry Potter movies involves not only images from the movies on product packages, but also television, radio and print advertising, contests, games, a website, in-store displays and a literacy and reading campaign (Lippman & McKay, 2001). The Hulk, Spider-Man and Captain America are enlisted to sell Original Brand Popsicles in ads in *Nickelodeon* magazine (*Nickelodeon*, 2003). Singer, actress and model, Beyoncé, stars in a Pepsi advertising campaign.

There are about 10 to 12 marketing tie-ins between children’s movies and fast-food or other retail establishments each year (Lippman & McKay, 2001). Baskin Robbins’ ice cream flavor of the month is tied to Dreamworks’ movie, *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas*. Applebee’s Neighborhood Grill and Bar’s marketing uses a tie-in to *Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie*.

Fast-food companies feature movies in their television ads, conduct contests and give away movie-based toys as part of children's meal packages, like McDonald's Happy Meals. McDonald's and the Walt Disney Company signed a 10-year exclusive contract in 1996, and promotions have included tie-ins with *Monsters Inc.*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Tarzan* and *Peter Pan in Return to Never Land*. Burger King has deals with DreamWorks studio and Nickelodeon (Ordonez, 2001). Tie-ins at Burger King have included the movies *Rugrats Go Wild*, *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, *Shrek* and *Pokemon 2000*, as well as the television programs *Rugrats*, *The Simpsons* and *SpongeBob Squarepants*.

The use of animation in ads also may blur the line between advertising and programming. Kotz and Story (1994) found that 28% of food advertisements aimed at children are animated and 48% are partially animated.

Enticing Children with Toys, Premiums, Games and Contests

Premiums and other giveaways, games and contests are used to interest children in food for reasons unrelated to the food itself. In many cases, the premium seems to be the primary enticement for the purchase, though children end up eating the food as well, which is often high in calories and low in nutrients. A television ad for McDonald's Happy Meals tied to the Peter Pan movie sequel, *Return to Never Land*, focused on a boy and girl playing with the toys, rather than on the food.

To keep children coming back, the toys that come with children's meals at fast-food restaurants change periodically. McDonald's had 14 different toy sets for Happy Meals in 2001 and 16 different sets in 2000 (McDonald's, 2002d). The toys are based on children's movies or television shows (as discussed above) or are popular toys like Bratz dolls, Teenie Beanie Babies, Hot Wheels cars, Hello Kitty, LEGOs and Barbie dolls. To encourage repeat business, there are usually six to eight toys to collect, which are available for only three to four weeks (requiring parents to bring their children to the restaurant about twice a week in order to collect all the toys).

Encouraging children to pester their parents to frequent McDonald's is important to business. Happy Meal sales make up 20% of McDonald's transactions in the U.S. (about \$3.5 billion in annual revenue) (Leung & Vranica, 2003). McDonald's also relies on sales to the accompanying parent. The average transaction involving Happy Meals is 50% greater than orders without Happy Meals (Leung & Vranica, 2003). To build on that success, McDonald's introduced the Mighty Kids Meal, with more food to appeal to older children.

Companies also use toys and other give-aways to sell packaged foods in supermarkets. Premiums have included beauty kits (Brach's Rapunzel fruit snacks), trading cards (Nabisco Ritz crackers), an E.T. Finger Flashlight (Post's Oreo O's cereal), Sesame Street dolls (in Kellogg's Rice Krispies), swim goggles (Kellogg's Eggo waffles) and

Mickey Mouse Bobble Head toys (Kellogg's Cocoa Rice Krispies and Keebler cookies).

In other cases, children are required to purchase a product many times in order to obtain the toy or other premium. Under these schemes, children typically collect UPC symbols or other proofs of purchase to trade for the premiums. Frito-Lay has "Ploids" (billed as "The Official Currency of Fun") on its snack packages, which can be redeemed for prizes at ePloids.com. However, since a child gets about one Ploid per one-ounce serving, and the premiums ranged in "cost" from 25 Ploids for sneaker stickers to 600 Ploids for a set of five electronic game pens (Frito-Lay, 2002), it seems more economical and sensible for parents to go to a retail store and purchase the toys their children want rather than buy the large amounts of nutrient-poor foods required to earn them by collecting Ploids. More recently, Frito-Lay moved to an auction format. A \$25 Blockbuster gift card was auctioned for 2,046 Ploids and a Lava lamp went for 1,440 Ploids (Frito-Lay, 2003). Extra Ploids are available on multi-packs, encouraging children to ask their parents to buy in bulk.

A Tony's pizza ad reads, "As if you need another reason to eat pizza" and "Eat Pizza. Get Points. Log On. Bid or Buy Stuff." The ad features a child stuffing his face with pizza and holding a toy. The Original Brand Popsicle, Kool-Aid, and Mega Warheads candy also have used premiums for points marketing.

Food as Entertainment.

Sometimes the food is designed to be

used in play or to be a toy itself. *Ad Age* reported that Kraft's Rip-Ums peel-and-eat cheese line will appeal to children because of the "play value of the product" (Thompson, 2002). Nabisco manufactures fruit snacks called Fun Fruits Gamesters which are game pieces for playing tic-tac-toe. Hershey's Candy Bar Factory is a chocolate bar with spaces for peanut butter filling, frosting, sprinkles and cookie bits that are included. Once put together, it has about five times the calories and fat of a regular Hershey's bar (440 calories versus 90 calories). Ads for Oscar Mayer's 260-calorie Fudge Brownie Lunchables instruct children to "Slap on some frosting" and decorate their brownie and then ask, "How fun is that?" (*Girl's Life*, 2001; *Nickelodeon*, 2001). Mystery Jell-O and Kool-Aid Magic Twists drink mix change into surprise colors.

M&M's Minis are available in a Toy and Pogo Dispenser tube. One ad for M&M's Minis was a game in which children slam down the M&M's tube and the child who dispenses the most Minis gets to eat all the candy (*Sports Illustrated for Kids*, 2001). Kid Cuisine's ad in *Nickelodeon* magazine is a game called Race to the Commvee (*Nickelodeon*, 2003) and a Necco candies ad is a find-the-differences game (*Disney Adventures*, 2003). Interaction with a brand while playing a game helps children to remember the product and brand, as well as cultivate positive attitudes about it.

Contests. Contests not only encourage children to purchase food for reasons unrelated to the food, but also

“In advertising sweepstakes to children, care should be taken not to produce unrealistic expectations of the chances of winning,” according to the Children’s Advertising Review Unit, the self-regulatory organization of the advertising industry (2002).

can be deceptive for children who do not understand how slim their odds of winning are. Wording such as, “You’ve Won \$10,000!” (on Nabisco Oreo cookies packages) and “2000 First Prize Winners!” (on Cap’n Crunch boxes) could mislead children about their odds of winning. Despite the picture of a toy box overflowing with Tiger Electronics toys on the back of the Cap’n Crunch cereal box, the odds of winning were one in 1,765,800 for the grand prize (every toy Tiger makes) and one in 8,829 for the first prize (one toy, chosen by the sponsor). The odds of winning one of the grand prizes in the Boards or Bikes contest, which occupies the entire back of some Oscar Mayer’s Lunchables boxes, is one in 27 million.

Using Health and Fitness to Sell Low-nutrition Foods to Children

Some ads misleadingly imply that foods are healthy by referring to them as good sources of energy (in other words, a good source of calories), by associating the product with athletes or physical activities, by showing the product surrounded by pictures of fruit, milk or other healthy ingredients, or by featuring

slim, healthy, fit kids enjoying high-calorie foods in the ads.

Kotz and Story (1994) found that nutrition and health are the implicit messages used most often in food advertisements aimed at children (in 49% of ads). Nutrition messages are used most commonly in ads for breakfast cereals, which claim to be “part of a complete/nutritious/balanced breakfast.” Another study found that when advertisements aimed at children show people eating the advertised food, almost all (89%) of the actors shown eating are slim and healthy-looking, despite the fact that 54% of the foods shown in the ads are high in calories, fat and sugar (Byrd-Bredbenner & Grasso, 2000).

Linking Junk Food with Fitness.

KC and his friends beat the Big Bad Wolf and his team in soccer after eating Kid Cuisine frozen dinners. In a television ad for Gatorade, which derives 100% of its calories from refined sugars, children drinking Gatorade are portrayed as “unstoppable” and cannot be caught by an adult.

Packages of Skippy’s peanut butter and chocolate Squeeze Stix snacks feature

“Approximately half of the nutrition-related information in food and beverage advertisements was misleading or inaccurate....Television must be recognized as a major source of nutrition (mis)information,” stated Byrd-Bredbenner & Grasso, Rutgers University and Montclair State University (2000).

a boy skating, playing soccer and skate boarding. The box of Post's Oreo O's cereal reads "Play Like the Pros! Hit Farther. Steal Faster. Field Better." and points children to its online Baseball Skills Challenge game. A Coca-Cola ad in *Teen People* (2003) features youth riding bicycles. Sammy Sosa, Mike Piazza and other baseball stars sell Big League Chew gum in its magazine ad (*Sports Illustrated for Kids*, 2003).

Sponsoring and other marketing at sporting events also associate food companies' products with fitness. PepsiCo hands out samples of Mountain Dew at surfing, skateboard and snowboard tournaments (Horovitz, 2002). In addition, PepsiCo has teamed up with the National Football League, Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer to sponsor youth sports skills competitions in local parks around the country. Its website features a number of star athletes. Bubblicious Bubble Gum, RC Cola, M&M/Mars and Stouffer's Foods sponsor Little League Baseball (Little League Baseball, 2003).

Fruitless Marketing. Another way in which companies position their products as healthy is to associate them with images of healthy ingredients like fruit. A magazine ad for Jolly Rancher Gel Snacks features a boy surrounded with images of watermelons and the text reads, "the next level of Fruitensity" (*Sports Illustrated for Kids*, 2001).

However, there is no fruit in the product. A television ad for Trix cereal features bold images of fruit, states that "colorful, fruity Trix is part of a good breakfast" and the cereal itself is shaped like fruits, yet

the cereal contains no fruit. Campbell's V8 Splash and Kraft's Kool-Aid Jammers drinks contain just 10% fruit juice, but their packaging is plastered with images of fruit and includes claims of being rich in vitamin C (which is added at the factory). An ad for Coca-Cola is a seek-and-find game with bottles of Coca-Cola hidden in a garden of tomatoes, corn and peas (*American Airlines Landing Zone*, 2002). The vegetable rows are labeled "smiles," "pretty eyes" and "strong teeth!"

Kellogg associated its Chocolate Chip Pop-Tarts with the nation's symbol of healthy eating, the Food Guide Pyramid, in a magazine ad (*Sport Illustrated for Kids*, 2001). Kellogg's "Chocolate Food Pyramid," with cookie, cake and toaster pastry groups, claimed to make eating chocolate easy. Kellogg also sells a coloring and activity book, *Healthy and Happy*, that urges children to "Be healthy with Tony the Tiger" (Kellogg, 2002b).

Soft Marketing: Image Ads

Many companies engage in event and cause marketing: direct advertising, charity work and donations that are designed to improve their corporate image. By associating their names with images of benevolence, companies hope that children and their parents will trust them and their products, and thus, in the long term, buy more of their product.

The U.S. General Accounting Office found that many businesses donate cash or assistance to schools for philanthropic purposes, but that the

donations often have commercial payoffs (GAO, 2000).Coca-Cola is a sponsor of the National PTA (PTA,2003).

When not aimed at schools, philanthropy is still often focused on children. Coca-Cola sponsors Boys and Girls Club of America (Coca-Cola, 2003). McDonald's sponsors awards, scholarships and health promotion programs for children and a reading program for families (McDonald's, 1998).

General Mills' Betty Crocker brand sponsors "The Great American Bake Sale," which urges people to hold a bake sale and donate the proceeds to Share Our Strength to fight child hunger (Betty Crocker, 2003).

"There are certain kinds of advertising and promotions that must be measured by specific volume results. [Harry] Potter is not one of those. Potter is designed to have a 'halo' effect," said John Sicher, editor and publisher of *Beverage Digest* (Leith, 2002).

Coca-Cola, the exclusive commercial sponsor for the first three Harry Potter films, spent \$287 million on their campaign tied to the movies (Walley, 2002) with the hope that some of "the magic" would rub off on the company. The campaign includes an image-boosting literacy and reading campaign. Sponsoring Olympic and other athletes also can be an image-booster, as it has the dual effect of appearing benevolent

and associating a product with health and athleticism. Coca-Cola and McDonald's are both Olympic sponsors.

Ads that Encourage Overeating

Some advertisements and marketing encourage children to overeat or eat large quantities or show big portion sizes. A magazine ad for Cap'n Crunch's Smashed Berries cereal reads, "Kids smashed 'em in the factory so you can fit more in your mouth" (*Nickelodeon*, 2001). An M&M's ad campaign uses the tag line "Tons of chocolate candy searching for a mouth" (*Disney Adventures*, 2003; *Nickelodeon*, 2003) and pictures a seemingly endless stream of candies headed toward an open mouth (*Disney Adventures*, 2002).

A Denny's restaurant ad shown during children's programming featured Miss Piggy, a Muppet character, ordering three Grand Slam breakfast platters for herself. Three platters provide 3,030 calories. "There is no such thing as too many Bugles" and "More is better" are the messages of a television ad for General Mills' Bugles snacks. Other tag lines in ads shown during children's programming include "Once you pop you can't stop" for Procter and Gamble's Pringles chips and "Get your own box" for Sunshine Cheez-Its snack crackers. One 16-ounce box of Cheez-Its has 2,400 calories and a-day-and-a-half's worth (30 grams) of saturated fat.

Pepsi's website profile of baseball star Jason Giambi, which displays the prominent quote, "I usually have several Pepsis each day – it really lifts me up," does not provide a good role model for

consuming sugary soft drinks in moderation (PepsiCo, 2003).

Marketing to Very Young Children

While the discussion above describes many examples of marketing aimed at preschool-aged children, it is important to emphasize. Food companies are targeting children at very young ages with marketing campaigns for low-nutrition foods. Companies work to get children to recognize and try their brands as early as possible, in the hopes of securing their lifelong loyalty.

Burger King has sold chicken nuggets shaped like Teletubbies and Rugrats, characters from programs targeted to preschoolers (Lusk, 2002). McDonald's Happy Meals have featured toys based on *Teletubbies* (McDonald's, 2002d), a program which is aimed at children as young as 1 year old. In addition, it sponsors and runs ads during Playhouse Disney, a block of programming for preschoolers on the Disney Channel (*Wall Street Journal*, 2002).

Some of the "ads you buy" are clearly aimed at small children. The cookie-jar shaped box for Fisher-Price's Oreo Matchin' Middles game states it is for children ages 3 to 7 ("no reading required"). Cereal, candy, cookie and other food counting and play books, like the *M&M's Birthday Book*, *Froot Loops! Counting Fun Book* and *Oreo Cookie Counting Book* are board books, which clearly are aimed at very young children.

Mechanical Spin Pop lollipops with figurines of Winnie the Pooh or the

Rugrats' Baby Dil make candy into a toy. The Keebler Company bakes cookies and cheese snack crackers into the shapes of Sesame Street characters like Cookie Monster and Elmo, and also features large pictures of the characters on the packages. Kellogg's Hunny Bs cereal, which is 40% sugars, is based on and prominently features on the box the Disney character Winnie the Pooh.

The Persuasive Power of Marketing Aimed at Children

The Food Industry Believes Food Marketing Is Effective

Companies use advertising and marketing to sell more product (by switching children to their brand or increasing the overall sales of the category) and increase profits. While they are not intentionally trying to undermine children's health, there is no disputing that the goal of food marketing aimed at children is to influence their food choices.

Companies clearly believe that advertising and other marketing are effective ways to influence children's food choices or they would not spend so much money on them. Overall, the industry spent \$26 billion advertising and promoting food products and brands in 2000 (Elitzak, 2001). On its website, McDonald's notes that, "Thanks to television commercials, his participation in fundraising events, and daily visits with children in hospitals, schools and McDonald's restaurants, Ronald McDonald has become a national institution - recognized by 96 percent of American children" (McDonald's, 1998).

Children's Understanding of Advertising

A review commissioned by the United Kingdom Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concluded that children begin to distinguish advertising from programming in early childhood (around 5 to 8 years old), though the distinction is based primarily on

fundamental characteristics such as that commercials are shorter than programs. Between approximately ages 9 to 12, the majority of children are aware that commercials are about selling things, but not until early adolescence do they develop a complete understanding of the intent of advertising, such as profit motives (Young et al., 1996). Thus, many children lack the cognitive skills and maturity to deal with advertising and are vulnerable to its persuasive appeals (Strasburger, 2001; Valkenburg, 2000). Children also may be more susceptible to advertising than adults and may need less exposure to produce a response. The Millward Brown research company found that children are three-times more likely to remember advertised brands than adults (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003).

In addition, children do not understand the complexities of good nutrition. That coupled with their lack of understanding of long-term health risks and their focus on the immediate make children especially vulnerable to the marketing of low-nutrition foods.

Younger children are more likely to believe that advertisements are truthful than older children (Ray & Klesges, 1993; Clancy-Hepburn et al., 1974). The Federal Trade Commission concluded that children six years and younger "place indiscriminate trust in televised advertising messages (and) they do not understand the persuasive bias in television advertising" (Elliott et, 1981). First graders were less likely to understand which sugary products shown in ads could cause dental cavities than were students in third and

sixth grade (Lambo, 1981). In a study of fifth and sixth graders, children believed that 70% of the commercials they saw for health-oriented products were true, and 90% of the children described the messages of the advertisements as intended by the sponsors (Lewis & Lewis, 1974).

Undue Influence: How Advertising Affects Children's Food Choices

Children learn behaviors by imitating role models – parents, teachers, peers, siblings, etc., including role models they see on television (Strasburger, 1999). Studies find that advertising influences children's food choices – which products and brands they prefer, what they choose and what they pester their parents to purchase.

“Marketing in and of itself is inherently manipulative, that's the whole point of it,” said Susan Linn, Harvard Medical School (Hood, 2000).

Children exposed to commercials are significantly more likely to choose the advertised items (Borzekowski & Robinson, 2001; Gorn & Goldberg, 1982; Jeffrey et al., 1982; Stoneman & Brody, 1981; Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Goldberg et al., 1978). Goldberg (1990) found that the more commercial television children see, the more likely they are to have advertised cereals in their homes. In addition, high school students who watch Channel One have more positive

attitudes about and report the intent to buy more of the products advertised on the station, but they did not report purchasing more of the advertised items as compared to students who did not watch Channel One (Greenberg & Brand, 1993). Eliminating ads for candy has been found to be as effective as showing positive ads for fruit in increasing fruit selections by children (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982).

USDA concluded that “foods with the highest advertising intensity tend to be the ones over-consumed relative to Federal dietary recommendations such as the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*” (Gallo, 1999). A survey of nutrition professionals found that a majority think that most corporate-sponsored school materials and programs are likely to influence children's food choices (Levine & Gussow, 1999).

Studies show that repeated exposure of young children to foods can increase acceptability and preference for those foods (Birch, 1998). While those studies have been conducted using direct taste and visual exposure to food, it seems likely that advertising similarly could increase children's familiarity with foods and positively affect food preferences. In other studies, children's liking for foods has been shown to increase after seeing them advertised on television (Ray & Klesges, 1993).

Pester Power

Critics of limiting food marketing aimed at children argue that although companies market their products directly to children, it is up to the parents

to decide whether to purchase those products. However, a key aim of marketing aimed at children is to get them to nag their parents to purchase certain foods. Marketers call this “pester power” or the “nag factor.” General Mills’ Betty Crocker Fruit Snacks website states, “Driving the ‘kid nag’ factor with gatekeepers [parents] is crucial to the category’s success” (General Mills, 2002).

From personal experience, most parents know that marketing campaigns are effective in driving children to request products. In addition, studies show that children who are exposed to commercials or who watch more television make more purchase requests of their parents for advertised foods

“All our advertising is targeted to kids....You want that nag factor so that seven-year-old Sarah is nagging mom in the grocery store to buy Funky Purple [ketchup]. We’re not sure mom would reach out for it on her own,” said Kelly Stitt, a senior brand manager at Heinz (Eig, 2001).

(Robertson et al., 1989; Taras et al., 1989; Stoneman & Brody, 1982; Galst & White, 1976; Clancy-Hepburn et al., 1974). Likewise, children whose parents limit television viewing make fewer purchase requests (Wiman, 1983). Sugary cereals, fast food, soft drinks, and candy are requested most often.

Though industry representatives counter that it is the responsibility of parents to

say “no” in the face of pestering, repeated nagging of parents and the need for parents to repeatedly say “no” can strain the parent-child relationship (this is on top of having to say “no” to nagging to see R-rated movies, play violent video games and buy clothes and toys parents may not be able to afford). Conflicts arise because the foods that are most heavily advertised to children are low-nutrition foods, of which parents would like their children to eat less. Parental authority is undermined by the wide discrepancies between what parents tell their children is healthy to eat and what marketers tell children is desirable to eat.⁸

Viewing television commercials for food and the number of purchase requests that children make of their parents are both associated with greater parent-child conflict (Robertson et al., 1989; Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Ward & Wackman, 1972). In a study that observed families in supermarkets, about a quarter of all interactions regarding choosing a breakfast cereal resulted in parent-child conflict (Atkin, 1978). When the cereal purchase request was denied, 65% of interactions resulted in conflict and 48% resulted in unhappiness (though the anger and unhappiness were usually short-lived).

Marketers count on children to wear their parents down and on parents to give in. Parents often find it easier to just say “yes” to reduce stress and strain

⁸Although it is beyond the scope of this report, there also is a disconnect between the calorie-dense, low-nutrition foods which are predominantly marketed to children and the thin body images portrayed in the media.

and allow them to focus on other issues (Kanner & Kasser, 2000). Even if parents say “no” most of the time, they need to find some things to say “yes” to. Thus, parents decide what things are the least bad and give in to those (Levin, 1998). Parents may choose to give in to junk-food requests rather than to R-rated movies, violent video games, clothes or toys parents cannot afford or risky activities with friends.

Health Effects of Advertising and Television Viewing

The World Health Organization recently concluded that heavy marketing of energy-dense and fast food is a “probable” contributor to obesity (WHO, 2003).

Children who watch more television (4 or more hours per day) have higher weights for height (body mass indices) (Crespo et al., 2001; Andersen et al., 1998; Gortmaker et al., 1996) and body fatness (skinfold thickness) (Andersen et al., 1998; Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985) than those who watch less (fewer than 2 hours a day). Gortmaker et al. (1996) found that a child who watches 5 or more hours of television a day is 5 times more likely to be overweight than a child who watches 0 to 2 hours. The relationship between obesity and television viewing is found even in preschool-age children (between 1 and 5 years old) (Dennison et al., 2002).

Obesity rates increase as the number of hours of television viewing increases (i.e., there is a dose-response relationship), which adds to the evidence that the relationship between television

viewing and obesity is causative, rather than just an association (Crespo et al., 2001; Gortmaker et al., 1996; Dietz, 1990; Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985). In addition, intervention studies have found reducing television viewing, either coupled with or without activities to change eating habits, to be an effective component of programs to reduce obesity (Gortmaker et al., 1999; Robinson, 1999).

Television viewing may contribute to obesity because of children snacking while watching TV, advertising that encourages increased calorie consumption, or the displacement of physical activity. Some studies have found that television viewing is associated with small reductions in physical activity levels, but the associations are either weak or not found at all (Coon & Tucker, 2002; Robinson, 2001).

Watching more television is associated with less healthful eating patterns (Robinson & Killen, 1995), even when controlling for the child’s reading level, parental education level and other factors (Signorielli & Lears, 1992). Children who watch more television consume more calories (Crespo et al., 2001; Taras et al., 1989). Girls who watch 5 or more hours of television a day consume 2,025 calories per day compared to 1,850 calories a day for girls who watch no more than 1 hour of television per day (Crespo et al., 2001). Although a similar association was found for boys, the results were not statistically significant.

Taras and colleagues (1989) found that food purchasing requests that resulted from exposure to commercial television were associated with higher intakes of saturated fat and sugar. (Requests were not associated with higher sodium intake, which was not accurately assessed by their food frequency questionnaire.) Children who watch more television eat more snacks in front of the television (Francis et al., 2003). In addition, exposure to television advertising has been shown to increase children's intakes of calories and/or snack foods (Francis et al., 2003 [for girls with at least one overweight parent]; Bolton, 1983,⁹ Jeffrey et al., 1982).

Advertising Can Effectively Promote Healthy Behaviors

Results from tobacco control programs provide strong evidence that media campaigns can promote healthy behaviors. Media campaigns, coupled with other strategies, have effectively reduced the percentage of adolescents who use tobacco (CDC, 2000a). The Florida Department of Health's "truth" campaign used advertising, advocacy and public relations and resulted in a 40% reduction in the smoking rates of middle school students and an 18% decline among high school students (Hicks, 2001). The counter ads that were aired between 1968 and 1970 significantly helped to reduce smoking, even though tobacco ads outnumbered

anti-smoking ads by about three to one (Dorfman & Wallack, 1993; Warner, 1977).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) review of ten studies found that large-scale, community-wide campaigns (media, usually coupled with community-based activities) can be an effective way to promote physical activity (CDC, 2001b). CDC concluded that community-wide campaigns can result in a 5% increase in the percentage of the community that is physically active and a 16% increase in energy expenditure.

Wheeling Walks, an eight-week population-based campaign to promote walking, used paid advertising and public relations activities supported by programs at worksites and other community locations. The campaign resulted in a 15% increase in the percentage of the population who reported walking at least 30 minutes per day on 5 or more days per week as compared to a control city (Reger et al., 2002).

Advertising also has been shown to effectively promote healthy eating. West Virginia University and the Center for Science in the Public Interest conducted a media campaign to determine whether paid advertising and public relations, in the absence of other programming, could change people's eating habits. Paid advertising on television and radio, supported by press conferences and other events to generate news coverage of the campaign, encouraged people to switch from whole or 2% milk (high fat)

⁹ Although the effect size in Bolton's study was small, snack foods are only one of a large number of low-nutrition food products marketed to children.

to 1% or fat free (low fat) (Reger et al., 1999).

Telephone surveys showed that 34% of people switched from high-fat to low-fat milk after the campaign, compared to 4% who switched over the same period in a similar city where the ads were not shown. Community-wide consumption of low-fat milk (as a percentage of total supermarket milk sales) increased by 60% – from 29% of sales before the campaign to 46% after the campaign. As a result of a mass media campaign in Arizona targeted to food stamp recipients, consumption of five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day doubled among those earning less than \$15,000 per year, and tripled among those earning \$15,000 to \$20,000 (Arizona Nutrition Network, 2001).

The results of most corporate food advertising campaigns are proprietary. One of the few published examples comes from the Kellogg Company's advertising campaign (television and print ads, coupons, messages on packaging) to encourage the consumption of high-fiber cereals. Supermarket sales data indicated that the market share of all high-fiber cereals increased by 37% over the 48-week study period (Levy & Stokes, 1987).

Regulations for Food Advertising and Marketing Aimed at Children

General Regulations

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is responsible for regulating and licensing radio and television stations (FCC, 2003). The FCC is charged with enforcing the Children's Television Act of 1990 (and the subsequent 1996 regulations to strengthen it), which put limits on the amount of advertising during children's television and require television stations to air three hours a week of educational and informational programming for children. In general, the FCC does not address the content of ads.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which enforces a number of federal antitrust and consumer protection laws, is charged with preventing deceptive and unfair acts and practices, which include advertising and marketing (FTC, 2003a). Deceptive acts and practices are defined as "a representation, omission or practice that is likely to mislead the consumer" (FTC, 1983). In addition, if a practice or representation is directed at a specific group, such as children, the FTC "examines reasonableness from the perspective of that group." Unfairness is broadly defined as "(1) whether the practice injures consumers; (2) whether it violates established public policy; or (3) whether it is unethical or unscrupulous" (FTC, 1980a).

The FTC has a working agreement with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

that gives the FTC primary responsibility for food advertising (except labeling) (FTC & FDA, 1988). The FTC has additional enforcement policy that addresses nutrient content claims and health claims in food advertising (FTC, 1994).

Regulations on Advertising to Children

Historically, both the FTC and the FCC have had jurisdiction over advertising to children. In 1974, the **Federal Communications Commission** was the first to implement regulations to address advertising aimed at children. The FCC required television stations to place separators between programs and commercials to aid children in identifying advertisements. It also set limits on the amount of advertising per hour during children's programs (U.S. House of Representatives, 1989).

During the deregulation efforts of the 1980s, the FCC dropped the limits on advertising time (Carmody, 1988). However, as a result of a lawsuit filed by the Action for Children's Television, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ordered the FCC to reexamine the issue (U.S. Court of Appeals, 1987). After the FCC failed to act, Congress stepped in. In 1989, Congress passed the Children's Television Act, but President Ronald Reagan pocket vetoed the bill. Congress passed the Children's Television Act again in 1990, and President George H.W. Bush allowed the bill to become law without his signature (Bush, 1990).

Current law, under the Children's Television Act, restricts advertising

during children's programs to no more than 10½ minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays (FCC, 1990). However, the bill did not reduce the amount of advertising aimed at children, since 10½ and 12 minutes were already the industry norm (Jacobson & Maxwell, 1994).

The Federal Trade Commission

issued a report on television advertising to children in 1978 (Ratner et al., 1978). The FTC concluded that "television advertising for any product directed to children who are too young to appreciate the selling purpose of, or otherwise comprehend or evaluate, the advertising is inherently unfair and deceptive." They wrote that "it is hard to envision any remedy short of a ban adequate to cure this inherent unfairness and deceptiveness." The FTC report recommended a ban on all television advertising aimed at young children and limitations on commercials for sugary foods aimed at older children, and recommended that advertisers of sugary foods fund nutrition and health messages to balance their advertisements.

Broadcasters, advertising agencies and food and toy companies strongly opposed the FTC findings. They worked to stop the FTC from holding hearings, lobbied Congress to prevent the FTC from using its funding to address children's television and filed a lawsuit against the Commission (Jacobson & Maxwell, 1994). Although the FTC did hold hearings on its proposals, before it could act, Congress passed the "Federal Trade Commission Improvements Act of 1980." The Act

withdrew the FTC's authority to issue industry-wide regulations to stop unfair advertising practices (FTC, 1980b). As a result, the FTC now regulates ads on a case-by-case basis.

The FTC, under the Reagan Administration, concluded that "child-oriented television advertising is a legitimate cause for public concern" and that young children do not have the cognitive ability to understand the persuasive intent of advertising and indiscriminately trust ads (Elliott et al., 1981). It also found that the techniques used in children's advertising enhance the appeal of advertised products. The FTC concluded that "the record establishes that the only effective remedy would be a ban on all advertisements oriented toward young children, and such a ban, as a practical matter, cannot be implemented," because then there would be no way to fund children's television programs. With that, the FTC's efforts to regulate children's television advertising came to an end (Jacobson & Maxwell, 1994).

More recently, the FTC issued regulations to implement the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, and has outlined procedures for commercial websites for obtaining parental consent before collecting, using or disclosing personal information from children (FTC, 2003b).

Self Regulation: Foxes Guarding the Hen House. In contrast to the efforts in the 1970s and early 1980s to restrict or ban advertising to children, today, food advertising and marketing aimed at children is left largely to occasional FTC enforcement actions and to self-

regulation by the industries that have a financial interest in selling food to children.

The Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU), a program of the Council of Better Business Bureaus and part of the advertising industry's self-regulation program, monitors advertising and marketing aimed at children through all media. CARU's 22-member advisory board includes executives from M&M/Mars, General Mills, Kellogg, Kraft Foods, McDonald's and Nestle USA. CARU has more than 35 supporters, which include Burger King, Frito-Lay, Hershey and PepsiCo. Other advisors and supporters are large toy companies, advertising agencies, computer companies and university faculty (CARU, 2003).

CARU has developed a set of "Self-Regulatory Guidelines for Children's Advertising." The Guidelines are based on seven laudable principles that state, among other things, that:

- Children's limited capacity for evaluating information dictates that advertisers have a special responsibility to protect young children from their own susceptibilities.
- Advertisers should be careful not to exploit unfairly children's imaginative qualities to create unrealistic expectations for their products.
- Advertisers should recognize that children may learn practices from

advertising that may affect their health and well-being.

- Recognizing the potential of advertising to influence behavior, advertisers should provide examples of positive and beneficial social behavior.
- Advertisers should contribute to th(is)e parent-child relationship in a constructive manner (CARU, 2002b).

Examples of the guidelines (for children under 12 years old) include (CARU, 2002):

- Copy, sound and visual presentations should not mislead children about product or performance characteristics. Such characteristics may include...nutritional benefits.
- Children should not be urged to ask parents or others to buy products.
- Studies have shown that the mere appearance of a character with a product can significantly alter a child's perception of the product. Advertising presentations by program/editorial characters may hamper a young child's ability to distinguish between program/editorial content and advertising.

The CARU Guidelines look good on paper. However, they are not enforceable beyond the limited complaint procedures established by CARU and voluntary action by a company. More

broadly, CARU's guidelines and case-by-case enforcement do not address the core of the matter: children's food preferences and choices are manipulated by advertising. Changing how the sales pitch is couched does not change that or the fact that most food ads aimed at children promote low-nutrition foods.

Advertising Laws and Regulations Related to Other Health Behaviors

Tobacco Advertising. Advertising for cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and little cigars is prohibited by law on television and radio (FTC, 2003b). The ban is enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice (ACS et al., 2002). In addition, tobacco product packages, advertising and point-of-purchase displays are required by law to carry health warning labels (FTC, 2003b). The Federal Trade Commission also can take action against deceptive and unfair tobacco advertising and marketing under its general authority under the FTC Act. In addition, states must ensure compliance with laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco to youth under 18 years old or risk losing funding from the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grant (ACS et al., 2002).

As part of the 1998 tobacco settlement with state attorneys general, cigarette manufacturers agreed not to "take any action, directly or indirectly, to target youth . . . in the advertising, promotion, or marketing of tobacco products" (National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2001). However, studies have shown that tobacco companies continue to advertise heavily in magazines that appeal to teenagers, such as *Sports*

Illustrated and *Rolling Stone*, use promotions such as hat giveaways, which appeal to youth, and use in-store displays and promotions that reach children (National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2001). In 2000, more than 80% of youth saw cigarette ads in magazines an average of 17 times (King & Siegel, 2001).

Alcohol Advertising. Alcohol advertising is only minimally regulated beyond the general prohibitions against deceptive and unfair practices of the Federal Trade Commission. In addition, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) of the U.S. Department of Justice prohibits certain claims specific to alcohol, such as claims about the intoxicating nature of the beverage and the strength of the alcohol (ATF, 1998). Up until 1996, the distilled spirits industry had voluntarily agreed not to advertise on television, but it is now advertising hard liquor on radio and cable television. Ads for hard liquor are still not accepted by television broadcast networks (FTC, 2003b).

Each industry (beer, wine and hard liquor) has a voluntary code regarding advertising aimed at children, as do many broadcasters. These address advertisement placement, content, product placement, website advertising and marketing on college campuses (FTC, 1999). However, those codes are weak, vaguely written and poorly enforced. For example, they allow placement of alcohol ads during programs where half the audience is younger than 21 years. That standard results in many children viewing alcohol advertising.

Regulation of Children’s Advertising in Other Countries

The European Union (EU) has enacted legislation that addresses advertising to children as part of its “Television without Frontiers” directive. It requires that advertising not “directly exhort minors to buy a product or a service by exploiting their inexperience or credulity;” “directly encourage minors to persuade their parents or others to purchase the goods or services being advertised;” or “exploit the special trust minors place in parents, teachers or other persons” (European Commission, 1997). The Directive also limits television commercials to 12 minutes per hour during all programming, including those aimed at children, and requires that advertising be “readily recognizable as such and kept quite separate from other parts of the program.” The Television without Frontiers directive, which was last revised in 1997, is in the process of being reviewed in 2003 to determine if it needs to be updated or adapted (European Commission, 2003).

In most European countries, advertising practices are regulated by a combination of law and industry self-regulation. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has a widely-adopted International Code of Advertising Practice, which includes guidance to industry on marketing to children and youth (ICC, 2003). This voluntary code encourages marketers not to take advantage of children’s inexperience; suggest that purchase of a product will give a child physical, social or psychological advantages over other children; undermine parental authority or judgements; or directly

appeal to children to persuade their parents to buy a product for them.

Several EU member countries impose additional restrictions beyond the Television without Frontiers standards and self-regulation (International Research Associates, 2001; Consumers International, 1996). Sweden, Norway and the Flemish region of Belgium have banned television advertising directed at children, including advertising during or immediately before and after children's programs. Broadcasters in Denmark

"There is in fact plenty of room for advertising children's products quite legally on TV in Sweden. You are free to let the commercials speak to parents, grandparents or any other grown-up," stated Axel Edling, Sweden's Consumer Ombudsman (1999).

have conceded to a similar voluntary restriction. Austria prohibits advertising during children's programming, but companies can advertise outside these dedicated children's program blocks in other shows popular with children. The United Kingdom limits ads on television to 7 minutes per hour generally and 7½ minutes per hour between 6 and 11 p.m. or between 7 and 9 a.m.

Australia does not allow advertising during programs for preschoolers, and limits ads to 5 minutes per half hour during "C"-rated programs (programs appropriate for primary school children) (Australian Broadcast Authority, 2002). However, Australian children's

programming is more often rated as "G," during which 13 to 15 minutes of advertising is allowed per hour. In the Canadian province of Quebec, advertising is not allowed during programming for which 15% or more of the audience is under 13 years old (Consumers International, 1996).

Although international consumer organizations have expressed concerns about companies circumventing regulations to limit advertising to children and about weak enforcement, the regulations do seem to reduce the amount of advertising to which children are exposed.

Some countries also place restrictions on promotions/prizes and/or on character tie-ins (Consumers International, 1996). Because premiums can interest children in products that they might not want otherwise, Denmark prohibits prizes from being offered to young people. Norway prohibits the use of irrelevant premiums in all advertising (including to adults). Australia does not allow prizes to be offered during preschool programming (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2002).

To reduce confusion between programming and advertisements, Denmark and Sweden prohibit characters or actors from children's programs from appearing in ads aimed at children (Consumers International, 1996). The UK prohibits such endorsements before 9 p.m. Australia prohibits them within 12 months of the personality or character appearing on a program. No EU countries limit the use of other popular personalities (such as

other actors, athletes or musicians) in advertising.

Several countries have regulations specific to food advertising aimed at children, such as that food advertising should not encourage excessive intake, contain misleading information about the nutritional value of a product, or discourage children from choosing fresh fruits or vegetables (Consumers International, 1996). In addition, the Netherlands and the Flemish region of Belgium require a toothbrush logo to appear in ads for sweets.

Marketing and advertising in schools is banned in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Portugal. Advertising and marketing is not allowed in schools in France, Italy or Luxembourg unless there is an educational link or it is approved by the governing agency. However, these regulations are not always followed or enforced (Consumentenbond, 1996).

The Challenge

A number of countries restrict marketing aimed at children. In the U.S., steps have been taken to reduce the marketing of products (tobacco and alcohol) that can undermine health. However, industry defeated past efforts to reduce junk-food marketing aimed at children in this country. The time has come for concerned citizens to urge school boards, state legislatures, Congress, television stations and the food industry to provide better food environments for children.

Recommendations

In late 1970s and early 1980s, there were efforts (which Big Business defeated) to reduce junk-food advertising aimed at children. Given the rising obesity and diabetes rates and children's poor eating habits, it is time to revisit current practices and strengthen laws and regulations to better protect children's health and support parents' efforts to feed their children healthy diets.

The following actions should be taken to encourage children to eat healthier diets and limit their exposure to marketing and advertising of low-nutrition foods:

Federal Government:

- Sponsor media-based campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity.
- Congress should give the Federal Trade Commission the authority and adequate funding to develop and implement (in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services) nutrition standards for foods that can be advertised and marketed to children and limit advertising and marketing for foods that do not meet those standards. Standards should be set for portion sizes, calories, saturated and trans fat, refined sugars and sodium and require minimal amounts of nutrients. Food companies' right to free speech must be balanced by the nation's compelling need to protect children's health.

- Prohibit product placement of low-nutrition foods in movies and television programs for which children are a significant portion of the audience.
- Fund research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to further assess the impact of food marketing on children's diets and health.
- Fund the National Academies' Institute of Medicine to conduct a review and write a report on the scope and impact of food marketing aimed at children and recommend any remedial measures that would help to protect children's health.
- Prohibit the marketing of low-nutrition foods in schools.
- Require that soft drink and vending contracts between schools and companies be reviewed by parents and other community members before they are signed. Ensure that the foods and beverages to be sold through those contracts meet nutrition standards. Prohibit the sale of soft drinks and other high-calorie, low-nutrition foods in schools anywhere on campus throughout the school day.
- Adopt guidelines for the use of corporate-sponsored educational materials in schools to ensure that they are accurate, objective and do not promote the consumption of low-nutrition foods.

State and Local Governments (Including Schools):

- State legislatures should provide funding to their health departments for media campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity.
 - The campaigns could be paid for out of general revenues or by implementing or increasing (for the 17 states that already tax soft drinks¹⁰) a small tax on soft drinks (one to two cents per 12-ounce soft drink).
- State health departments should conduct a review and write a report on food marketing aimed at children.
- Implement media literacy programs to teach children the purpose of advertising and how to identify and resist advertising and other marketing techniques.

Industry:

- Agree not to market low-nutrition foods to children or encourage children to overeat.
- Agree not to take advantage of children's inexperience and vulnerabilities, and follow

¹⁰States include AR, CA, IL, IN, KY, ME, MN, MO, NJ, NY, ND, RI, TN, TX, VA, WA, and WV. A list of state soft-drink tax policies from the National Conference of State Legislatures can be found at www.ncsl.org/programs/health/snacktax.htm.

guidelines for responsible food marketing aimed at children.

- Do not prey on schools' financial situation by offering them contracts, financial incentives, products or services in exchange for the opportunity to sell and market low-nutrition foods to children in schools.
- Do not place candy and other low-nutrition foods in check-out aisles or on low shelves in grocery, drug, toy, video and other retail stores. Low-nutrition foods should be placed at parents' eye level, not at children's.

Parents, Health Professionals and Other Community Members:

- Speak up, work with others and urge local, state and federal officials to pass laws to limit junk food marketing aimed at children.
- Urge broadcasters, food companies, restaurants and others who market food to adhere to guidelines for responsible food marketing aimed at children and support companies that follow those guidelines.
- Evaluate the amount and types of advertising and marketing of low-nutrition foods in your local school. Take steps to reduce it.
- Be a positive role model for healthy eating and limiting television viewing.

- Limit children's television viewing time, monitor which shows your children view, watch with your children, and do not allow your children to have a television in their bedroom.
 - Turn the television off while your children are doing homework or eating meals.
 - Mute the television during commercials or videotape TV shows so that you can fast forward through the commercials.
- Do not allow your children to be subjects in market research.
- The American Psychological Association should amend its code of ethics and psychologists should refuse to help food companies delve into children's psyches and manipulate their food preferences for low-nutrition foods (Kanner and Kasser, 2000).
- Pediatricians should counsel families about television viewing/food marketing and their effects.
- State Attorneys General and trial lawyers should consider options for using the courts to protect children from junk-food marketing.

Conclusion: Parents Cannot Compete with Advertising

A healthy diet, beginning in childhood, is crucial to preventing obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other diseases. Those **chronic diseases/conditions often take decades to develop, but have their roots in childhood, when disease processes begin and eating habits are formed.** Yet few children are eating in accordance with dietary guidelines, and the rates of obesity and diabetes are rising rapidly in children. Parents bear most of the responsibility for feeding their children well. However, society should support parent's efforts by protecting children from practices that can harm their health.

Although children's food choices are affected by many factors, food marketing is an important one. Companies relentlessly bombard children with messages to eat too much – especially high-calorie, low-nutrition foods. **Food marketing aimed at children has increased dramatically over the last two decades. As this report documents, it now reaches children almost everywhere they are throughout the day,** through television, magazines, websites, product placement in movies, product packaging, in-store displays, books, clothing and even in school, as well as the ubiquitous placement of fast-food restaurants and vending machines.

Food manufacturers and chain restaurants use aggressive and sophisticated marketing techniques to attract children's attention,

manipulate their food choices, and prompt them to pester their parents to purchase products. Harry Potter, SpongeBob Squarepants, Winnie the Pooh, Elmo, games, contests, prizes and sports stars are enlisted to entice children to request low-nutrition foods.

Companies use advertising and other marketing techniques to sell more product and increase profits. While they are not intentionally trying to undermine children's health, **the goal of food marketing aimed at children is to influence their food choices,** and that contributes to over-eating the very foods of which children should be eating less.

Many children, especially young children, lack the cognitive skills and maturity to understand advertising or to understand that advertisers are trying to sell them something or may exaggerate claims. **Studies demonstrate that advertising influences children's food preferences and choices and what they pester their parents to purchase.** Persistent nagging of parents and the need for parents to repeatedly say "no" can strain the parent-child relationship (this is on top of having to say "no" to nagging to see R-rated movies, play violent video games and buy clothes and toys parents may not be able to afford).

Conflicts arise because the foods that are most heavily marketed to children are low-nutrition foods. Conflicts also result from and parental authority is undermined by the wide discrepancies between what parents tell their children is healthy to eat and what marketers tell

children is desirable to eat. **Marketers count on children wearing their parents down and on parents giving in** and purchasing low-nutrition foods for their children.

Public policy has been used to protect children from products or behaviors that could harm them, even when such policies might negatively affect businesses. Tobacco advertising is banned from television and radio, some steps have been taken to restrict ads for alcohol and cigarettes to limit children's exposure to them, and the sale of alcohol to children under 21 is illegal.

As early as 1952, television broadcasters, in their now-defunct Television Code, recognized that "television broadcasters should exercise the utmost care and discrimination with regard to advertising material, including content, placement and presentation, near or adjacent to programs designed for children" (National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters, 1952). That tradition is supposed to be continued through the industry-sponsored Children's Advertising Review Unit's (CARU) voluntary, self-regulatory system.

However, **as this report documents, many food companies are not advertising and marketing products to children responsibly and the current regulatory system is inadequate to protect children's diets and health.**

There Is Hope

In the past few years, parents, school officials and legislators in some communities have begun to fight the junk-food marketers. California has banned the sale of soft drinks in elementary and middle schools. New York, Los Angeles, Oakland (CA), Portsmouth (NH) and other cities have banned soft drinks in all their public schools. States, including Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, Texas and Washington, have introduced (but not yet passed) legislation to get junk food out of schools (visit www.cspinet.org/schoolfoods for more information about state and local efforts to improve school foods). The fear of lawsuits has spurred McDonald's, Kraft and other companies to placate parents by offering a few more healthful choices. But overall, little progress has been made in protecting children from food marketers.

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