Kids' everyday exposure to food marketing

L. N. Signal
J. Stanley
M. Smith
M. B. Barr
T. J. Chambers
J. Zhou
A. Duane
C. Gurrin
A. F. Smeaton
C. McKerchar
A. L. Pearson
J. Hoek
G. L. S. Jenki
C. Ni Mhurchu

Video Abstract

Keywords: food marketing, childhood obesity, obesogenic environments, wearable cameras, Kids'Cam, New Zealand, sugar-sweetened beverages, sugary drinks, fast food, snack foods, food packaging, food advertising, healthy diet, unhealthy food marketing, public health, ECHO Commission, image coding, behavioral nutrition

Posted Date: September 20th, 2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.2.15092/v1>

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[Read Full License](#)

Abstract

In the past 30 years, the number of children who are overweight or obese has increased by nearly 50 percent. Ads for sugary cereals, soda, and other junk foods are thought to contribute to this rise, but few studies have directly measured how much marketing children see in a typical day. Now, using wearable cameras, researchers in New Zealand have done just that, finding that marketing for unhealthy foods outnumbers that for healthy foods by more than 2 to 1. The scientists recruited children attending various schools in Wellington to wear a small camera, or Kids'Cam, that would take snapshots every 7 seconds to capture marketing exposures. The students were about 12 years old and came from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Recording lasted for four days, starting on a Thursday to cover both schooldays and weekends. The team reviewed all of the images from the 168 participants, coding each image for any food marketing. Most of the marketing was in the form of food packaging, but also included ads on signs, in print, or merchandising. On average, children saw marketing for unhealthy food – most often soda, fast food, and candy – a whopping 27 times a day. That was more than twice the rate of healthy food marketing, which children saw just 12 times a day. A third of these unhealthy exposures happened at home, a fifth at school, and another 30 percent were in public spaces, such as the street or outside stores. Children attending higher-income schools were exposed to more healthy food marketing, and Māori children were exposed to more food marketing of both types than New Zealand European or Pacific children, although the latter was not statistically significant in the adjusted models. The results suggest that children typically see substantial amounts of unhealthy food marketing every day – even in schools, which are required to protect children's health. These findings support the recommendation by the World Health Organization's Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity to restrict unhealthy food marketing to children, including in schools and public places.