

« Advertising for fruit and vegetables is globally inexistent »

## Editorial

### Marketing of Foods: Opportunities for Fruits & Vegetables

The foods that are advertised are certainly not the foods that people should eat; rather they are the “noncore” foods manufactured and marketed by large food companies. This sobering conclusion is evident in all three papers in this special issue. In the first paper, Watson, Pettigrew, Chapman, and Hughes show that there are 100 television commercials for unhealthy foods for each commercial advertising fruits or vegetables. In the second paper, Thomas shows that unhealthy foods are particularly likely to be advertised in and around sport events, leveraging a “health halo”. The third article, by Martin-Biggers, Quick, and Byrd-Bredbenner, offers some hope, though. It shows that food retailers, unlike manufacturers, allocate space on the first page of their circulars roughly in the order of the types of food that people eat—even though still not in the order of what people should eat.

These results highlight a big opportunity for fruits and vegetables. As explained in a [recent review paper](#), the same marketing strategies that are used for unhealthy foods work equally well for fruits and vegetables, and may work even better because they are still so rare in this category. Here are the [key recommendations](#) to make it happen. First, think beyond advertising and consider all marketing tools. For example, sales promotions don’t just increase the sales of fruits and vegetables in the short term. They have also been found to increase long-term consumption by developing a taste for these products. Second, think beyond promoting health benefits. They are not as motivating as people say they are and they are often associated with degraded taste or inconvenient preparation. Instead, consider promoting a related benefit like environmental sustainability, which is an identity marker for today’s younger generation. Third, partner with retailers. They have a strong incentive to promote fruits and vegetables which contribute so much to the perceived freshness and overall appeal of their stores, plus they are eager to reduce the maddeningly high waste in these aisles. Finally, consider partnering at the industry level, just like the United States dairy industry has done in the long-running “Got Milk” campaign or the diamond industry with the “Diamonds are forever” campaign.

Pierre Chandon

Director of the INSEAD Social Science Research Centre –FRANCE

References available at <http://faculty.insead.edu/pierre-chandon>

*An apple a day*



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International Fruit And Vegetable Alliance  
c/o Canadian Produce Marketing Association  
162 Cleopatra  
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# The advertised diet: an examination of the extent and nature of food advertising on Australian television

W Watson<sup>a</sup>, S Pettigrew<sup>b</sup>, K Chapman<sup>a</sup>, C Hughes<sup>a</sup>

a. Cancer Council NSW, Sydney, AUSTRALIA

b. Curtin University, Perth, AUSTRALIA

## The advertised diet

The advertised diet in Australia completely contradicts the daily diet recommended for good health and protection against non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. Food advertisements mostly promote highly processed unhealthy packaged and fast foods.

This study examined two months of television advertising in 2010 across four television stations in five Australian cities<sup>1</sup>. Most advertisements depicted non-core foods (63%), such as confectionery, fast food, processed cheese snacks and beverages. In contrast, only 25% of all food advertisements were for core foods that are suitable for daily consumption, including bread, cereals, rice, pasta, vegetables, fruits, lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and legumes. Eighty-four percent of beverage advertising was for non-core beverages, with over half of those being for sugar-sweetened soft drinks. More than a quarter of advertisements were for fast food.

Only 6% of advertisements were for fruits and vegetables. During the study period there were no social marketing messages promoting healthy eating. Other studies have found similar low levels of fruit and vegetable advertising. A study of advertisements on the three main Sydney free-to-air commercial television channels in May 2011 found 0.03 ads/hour/channel for fruit and vegetables compared to 3.15 ads/hour/channel for unhealthy foods<sup>2</sup>.

## The advertising dollar

The expenditure on television food advertising for the two month study period was Au\$233 million. In stark contrast, in 2004, the Australian government allocated Au\$116 million over four years « to tackle the growing problem of declining physical activity and poor eating habits of Australian

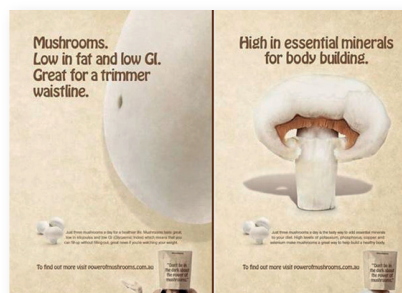
children”. One part of that initiative involved delivering the Go for 2&5<sup>®</sup> information campaign that promotes the daily fruit and vegetable consumption recommendations.<sup>3</sup> Although Go for 2&5<sup>®</sup> was successful in generating awareness amongst parents and children and produced an increase in the proportion of parents consuming vegetables at moderate levels<sup>3</sup>, behaviour change requires sustained campaigns.

## Protecting adults and children

A high level of repetition of advertisements is common in Australia. Repetition can influence brand preference and choice by creating top-of-mind awareness of that brand<sup>4</sup>. Although adults should recognise the persuasive intent of advertising and in theory can protect themselves from it, this could be undermined by the sheer magnitude of non-core food advertisements. Recent research suggests that many adults are just as susceptible to food advertising as children<sup>5</sup>.

It is important to ensure people understand the misalignment between the advertised diet and the recommended diet. There is a need for more social marketing messages providing information about the characteristics of a healthy diet and the importance of a nutritious diet, including fruit and vegetables, to overall health.

Although there is limited research on the effect of advertising on people's diets, there is almost 40 years of evidence on the influence and effect of food marketing to children<sup>6</sup>. Such marketing influences children's nutrition knowledge, food preferences and purchase behaviour; encourages them to ask their parents to purchase foods they have seen advertised; influences the food they eat; and ultimately adversely affects their health<sup>6</sup>. A public health priority has to be to protect children from the power of advertising, keeping in mind that adults also may not be immune



« In contrast, only 25% of all food advertisements were for core foods that are suitable for daily consumption... »

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# Unhealthy food and beverage marketing during sport

Samantha Thomas

School of Health and Society, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wollongong, AUSTRALIA

Obesity has become one of the most pressing public health issues of the modern era. While at the most basic level obesity is the result of a simple 'energy in – energy out' equation, research shows that the behaviours that surround this equation are clearly influenced by the food environments. This has led researchers to look closely at mapping and monitoring the range of tactics that are used by industry to stimulate the consumption of unhealthy food products, as well as the policy responses that are needed to effectively tackle these food environments<sup>1</sup>.

## Unhealthy food marketing and sport

One specific form of marketing that has received attention is the promotion and alignment of unhealthy foods and beverages during sporting matches. Sport has been identified as a particularly influential marketing channel as it allows companies to align their products with activities that are perceived as healthy and that have a positive impact on communities. However, public health experts have expressed concern about the alignments of advertising for unhealthy food products and sport<sup>2</sup>, with this form of marketing influencing children's perceptions and families purchasing habits of unhealthy foods<sup>3</sup>. A key concern is children's repeat exposure to unhealthy brands during sports<sup>4</sup> with studies showing that children have implicit recall of the unhealthy brands associated with sport<sup>5</sup>.

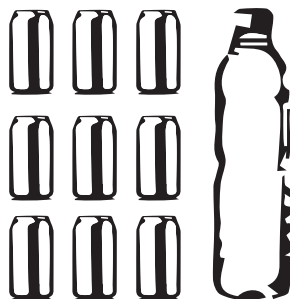
## The extent of unhealthy food and beverage marketing in sport

A number of researchers have attempted to quantify the amount of time spent advertising unhealthy foods and beverages during sporting matches. These studies have sought to examine the amount of advertising embedded within sporting matches (for example via sponsorship, jumper logos, boarding around the ground, or in game announcements) and formal commercial break advertising. In Australia these studies have focused on a number of nationally significant

sports – including the Australian Football League, national Cricket series, and the National Rugby League. This research has shown a number of significant findings about the placement of advertising for unhealthy food or "junk food" products during sporting broadcasts. Sherriff and colleagues (2010), found that advertising for unhealthy food and alcohol products was visible during 44% and 74% of game footage for three televised professional cricket events<sup>6</sup>. A similar study identified an average of 17 episodes and 2.74 minutes of unhealthy food and beverage marketing per match during a national sporting series<sup>7</sup>. Finally, a study conducted in the Australian state of Victoria found that television viewers in this state were exposed to a higher volume of junk food and alcohol advertising during television sports broadcasts than during other television programming, with nearly half (45.7%) of all junk food advertisements shown during sporting matches from July 2010 - January 2011<sup>8</sup>. This study also found that viewers had significantly more time exposure to alcohol, junk food and sugary drink products through in-game advertising than in-break advertising. Finally, in a study of sports websites in New Zealand, Carter and colleagues [2013] found that both healthy and unhealthy brands sponsored sport.

## Implications for Public Health

There are a number of implications for health promotion and public health interventions. Firstly will be the requirements for policy initiatives which aim to redress the balance between the promotion of healthy and unhealthy products during sport. This may include regulatory efforts, including initiatives which seek to limit the amount of exposure during sporting activities that may be highly viewed by children. Incentives are also required to encourage local and national level sporting codes to move towards relationships with products that are health promoting and that provide opportunities for a new range of messages about healthy food consumption and sport.



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# What foods are U.S. supermarkets promoting? An analysis of supermarket sales circulars

Jennifer Martin-Biggers, Virginia Quick and Carol Byrd-Bredbenner

Nutritional Sciences Department, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, USA

Despite widespread use of newspapers and mailed circulars<sup>1</sup>, food advertising research has focused primarily on television advertising, with limited attention on newspaper ads. This study analyzed supermarket newspaper sales circulars to describe the foods advertised by leading supermarkets across the U.S. to compare regional differences (geographic and obesity-rate region) as well as differences with USDA's MyPlate recommendations.

## How Circulars Were Analyzed

Sales circulars issued between mid-September to early October 2011 were collected from the 2011 Top North American Retail Supermarket Chains<sup>2</sup> in each state. Each food item was grouped (i.e., MyPlate groups plus sweets, fats, and miscellaneous) and the percentage of space it occupied computed. Only the first page was included in the sample to permit similar comparisons across stores and also because readers regularly scan the first advertising page<sup>3</sup>.

## What Were the Results?

The greatest proportion of space on the front page of supermarket sales circulars was devoted to protein foods, most of which were meat. One-fifth of the advertising space was occupied by grains. Foods in the fruits and vegetables groups each were allotted about one-tenth of the sampled advertising space—about the same amount of space allocated to sweets. States with less than a 25% obese population devoted significantly more space to fruits than other regions. Sweets and sugary drinks occupied significantly more space in the states with an obesity rate of at least 30% than those

with lower obesity rates. Supermarkets in the southern U.S. tended to allocate significantly more advertising space to sweets and the western region tended to devote significantly less space to vegetables and more to fruits. Overall, supermarket circulars devoted significantly less space to dairy, fruits, and vegetables than MyPlate recommendations and significantly more space to protein foods.

## Implications

The rank order of the advertising space devoted to each food group (i.e., protein, grains, sweets, dairy, fruits, vegetables, fats) is similar to the proportion each food group typically contributed to diets in the US<sup>4</sup>, as well as the proportion of the food-at-home dollar spent<sup>5</sup>. These similarities of space and food-at-home expenditures coupled with positive relationships for fruit, vegetable, and sugary drink space and intake (or purchase) of these foods groups leads to the consideration of whether sales circulars are shaping dietary intake or reinforcing existing patterns<sup>6</sup>. The limited research available suggests that sales promotions can influence short-term purchasing but may not shift dietary patterns<sup>7,8</sup>. However, econometric research using sales data as a proxy for dietary intake indicate that sales promotions have the potential to influence consumer purchasing and may encourage purchases and consumption<sup>9</sup>.

More research is needed to determine how sales circulars affect consumer food choices and discover how the power of the advertising channel can be harnessed to promote healthy dietary patterns.



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