

Study Finds More Licensed Characters, Other Packaging Promotions Used to Market Less Nutritious Foods to Kids

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Supermarket aisles are enticing young eyeballs with more familiar characters, celebrities, toys and movie giveaways on food packaging than ever, according to a Yale University study.

Published in the March 2010 issue of *Public Health Nutrition*, the study shows a significant increase in the use of youth-oriented cross-promotions on [food packaging](#) in the supermarket. Cross-promotions targeted at children and teens increased by 78 percent from 2006 to 2008, the analysis finds, and only 18 percent of products examined met accepted nutrition standards for foods sold to youth.

In the study, conducted by the Rudd Center for [Food Policy](#) at Yale, researchers purchased and examined all products with cross-promotional packaging in a large supermarket on three occasions from 2006 to 2008, categorizing nearly 400 total products by promotional partner, food category, targeted age group, promotion type, product nutrition and company policies on marketing to children.

In addition to the sharp increase in overall youth-oriented cross-promotions, the study found:

- Nutritional quality of kids food products with cross-promotional packaging declined during the period of study;

- 71% of cross promotions involved licensed characters, with 57% of those appealing primarily to children younger than 12 years of age;
- The use of other forms of promotions, such as athletes, sporting events, toys and games, increased from 5% of the total in 2006 to 53% in 2008.

Notably, food manufacturers that have pledged to limit marketing to children through the Council of Better Business Bureaus' Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative represented 65% of all youth-oriented cross promotions observed in the study. Most of these companies' pledges do not apply to marketing to children that occurs in stores. In addition, use of cross-promotions among these companies increased significantly, and the nutritional quality of their products did not improve.

“The marketing of foods with low nutritional value to children in grocery stores should raise as much concern as it does on television or the Internet,” said Jennifer L. Harris, PhD, Director of Marketing Initiatives at the Rudd Center. “Foods with promotions targeted at [children](#) contained significantly more sugar than foods targeted at other age groups, and companies who have pledged to reduce unhealthy marketing to kids are the biggest offenders.”

The study did show progress among some media companies, including Disney and Warner Brothers. Both companies reduced the volume of licensing for youth promotions in supermarkets during the period of study, and nutritional quality of food products with third-party licensed characters overall showed some improvement.

Provided by Yale University

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