

Do TV ads affect children's diet, obesity?

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Researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute for Health Research and Policy have received a \$2.2 million federal grant to determine whether or not TV food advertising affects children's diet, physical activity and weight.

The four-year project, funded by the National Cancer Institute, is unique because it will separate out the effect of food advertising from the amount of time that children watch TV.

"A number of studies have shown that increased TV watching is associated with higher weight outcomes among kids, but they haven't been able to determine whether or not this is directly due to the type of ads children see," said Lisa Powell, research professor of economics at UIC and lead scientist on the study.

[Watching television](#) may also contribute to obesity because children are sedentary and likely to snack while they watch TV.

The research, Powell said, can provide important information for policymakers and public health advocates about the potential effectiveness of regulating television food advertising to children and using TV media campaigns as policy tools for improving these health outcomes.

Previous research conducted by Powell and her colleagues showed that 98 percent of food-product ads viewed by children ages 2 to 11, and 89 percent of those viewed by adolescents ages 12 to 17, were for foods

high in fat, sugar or sodium.

The current study is the first to combine food, beverage and restaurant ad ratings and nutritional data with individual data on obesity to analyze the relationship between product exposure, nutritional content of ad exposure, and [food consumption](#), diet quality and obesity, according to the researchers.

The study will also examine the relationship between exposure to health promotion ads -- those that encourage eating fruits and vegetables or getting regular [physical activity](#) -- and individual behaviors related to diet, activity and weight outcomes.

By measuring the types of ads that children of different ages and races are exposed to, the researchers hope to be able to determine if advertising practices and television viewing patterns contribute to differences in diet and obesity among white and black children.

This work builds on previous studies Powell and her colleagues have conducted examining the effects of environmental factors on children's obesity.

Powell hopes this study will play a crucial role in determining whether or not stronger regulation may be needed for [food advertising](#) on children's programming.

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

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