

Fast food and sweets advertised when children watch television

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Children in Sweden are exposed to a huge number of TV advertisements. Food adverts – primarily for fast food and sweets – dominate the advertisements shown during children's viewing times. Research from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, shows that Sweden is no different from other countries when it comes to the number of adverts that children are exposed to.

Children between the age of three and 12 in Sweden encounter an average of 50 or so TV advertisements for food a week, dominated (in descending order) by [fast food](#), alcohol, chocolate and sweets. The results were presented recently in an article by 13 research groups in different countries in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The link between food and advertising

There is a proven link between food advertising and the food choices that children make. 10% of schoolchildren worldwide and 22 million children under the age of five are overweight or obese.

Children of this age in Sweden watch around 100 minutes of television a day, two thirds of which involves commercial channels. The most popular channels with children are TV3, TV4 and Kanal 5, all of which were monitored by researchers as part of the international study.

11 countries

"Although Sweden is seen as a progressive country because we've passed legislation that limits television advertising targeting children, they still get a lot of exposure to food adverts," says Hillevi Prell at the University of Gothenburg's Department of Food and Nutrition, and Sport Science.

Sweden over the average

The Swedish researchers studied almost 200 hours of television programming on the three channels, and classified all adverts between 6 am and 10 pm on two weekdays and two weekend days. Children's most popular viewing hours – when fast food, alcohol, chocolate and sweets dominated the food advertisements – were between 7 and 10 pm on weekdays, and 7 and 10 am and 5 and 10 pm at weekends.

13 groups of researchers in 11 countries monitored food advertising during peak viewing periods for children. Across the study, 18% of adverts were for food, with food advertisements shown an average of five times an hour. Sweden was slightly above this average with six food adverts an hour.

Empty calories

"Given that older [children](#) spend far longer in front of the telly, and that a high proportion of adverts are for empty calories, the marketing of less healthy foods needs to be looked at," says Christina Berg, docent at the Department of [Food](#) and Nutrition, and Sport Science.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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