

Product placements market unhealthy food to children

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Children are being exposed to almost one advertisement every day for unhealthy food, beverage, and restaurant brands via product placements on prime-time TV, finds a study from Yale's Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity. The study — which is the first to categorize, quantify, and report children's exposure to this type of marketing — shows a loophole in the current food industry's self-regulatory pledges to advertise only "better-for-you" foods to children, say the researchers. The study appears in the September issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Researchers analyzed data obtained from Nielsen, a media research company, on how often brands for unhealthy foods, beverages and restaurants appeared on prime-time TV programming during 2008. They found nearly 35,000 food, beverage, and restaurant brands appeared in prime-time TV programming that year. Despite frequent brand appearances for products in several categories, the majority of exposure was for regular soft drinks from just one company, Coca-Cola, which accounted for 71% of product-placement appearances viewed by children and approximately 60% of adult and adolescent exposure. Children viewed five times as many product placements as they did traditional, paid television commercials for Coca-Cola products.

In 2006, the Council of Better Business Bureaus launched the voluntary Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), which required participating companies to "cease paying for or actively seeking to place their food and beverage products in editorial and programming

content that is primarily directed to children aged 12 and under for the purpose of promoting the sale of those products." Coca-Cola was among the companies that pledged not to advertise any of their products to children. In spite of these pledges, the authors found that the products of companies participating in CFBAI made up 80% of the brand appearances viewed by children.

According to Jennifer L. Harris, Ph.D., the Rudd Center's director of marketing initiatives, "product placements enable advertisers to reach large TV audiences in a way that many, especially young children, may not recognize as advertising." She notes that with product placement, "CFBAI companies can claim they are not [advertising](#) to children while still exposing [children](#) to substantial amounts of marketing on prime-time TV."

Provided by Yale University

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