

Food ads targeting parents promise taste, convenience, but deliver bad nutrition, study finds

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With childhood obesity recognized as a growing national problem, a University at Albany School of Public Health study finds that a majority of food advertisements in magazines targeting parents emphasize products of poor nutritional quality that may contribute to unhealthy weight gain.

The study, published in *Public Health Nutrition*, examines [food advertisements](#) directed towards parents in national parenting and family magazines. The study's authors used [content analysis](#) to examine advertisements appearing in four issues each of six different national magazines during 2008.

"Much research has been done looking at food ads directed toward youth, so we wanted to look at foods ads aimed at parents since parents play an important role in shaping the diet of their children," said Jennifer Manganello, the study's lead author and an assistant professor in the Department of Health Policy, Management & Behavior in the UAlbany School of Public Health.

In 476 food ads, which represented approximately 32 percent of all ads in the magazine sample, snack food ads appeared most frequently (13%), followed by dairy products (7%). The most frequently used ad message was "taste" (55%). Other repeating non-food themes used in ads included "convenience," "fun," and "helping families spend time

together." Some ads promoted foods as "healthy" (14%) and some made specific health claims (18%), such as asserting the product would help lower cholesterol.

However, the study's authors, all public health researchers, found that more than half (55.9%) of the food products advertised were of poor [nutritional quality](#), based on total fat, saturated fat, sodium, protein, sugar, and fiber content, and that ads for these low-nutrition products were slightly more likely to use such sales themes as "fun" and "no guilt."

Manganello and study colleagues conclude that interventions should be developed to help parents understand nutritional information seen in [food ads](#) and to learn how various foods contribute to providing a balanced family diet.

"We recommend that parents carefully review nutrition labels for food purchases to obtain the information they need to make informed decisions about the foods they give their children," she said.

More information: [journals.cambridge.org/action/ ...
e=online&aid=8776360](https://journals.cambridge.org/action/...e=online&aid=8776360)

Provided by University at Albany

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