

Study reveals parents not immune to junk food advertising

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(Medical Xpress)—The idea that adults are better equipped than children to resist junk food advertising has been debunked by a new study that has found both are influenced by television and Internet advertising.

The research, led by [Health Promotion](#) Evaluation Unit Director Professor Simone Pettigrew, at The University of Western Australia, studied the impact of TV and Internet food advertising on more than 1000 Australian [parents](#) and 1000 [children](#). The study was published this week in *Public Health Nutrition*.

Researchers from UWA, the University of Adelaide and the Cancer

Council surveyed parents and their children aged eight to 14 who viewed advertisements for four commonly advertised energy-dense but nutrient-poor foods.

The maximum age of 14 is based on a previous assumption that up until this age children may be unable to activate the cognitive defences required to withstand advertising effects. Adults, by comparison, are considered to be sceptical of advertising and able to activate appropriate cognitive defences.

After watching each ad once, the parents evaluated the products more favourably, had a greater desire to consume the products and thought they could eat them more frequently.

Professor Pettigrew said the study results were particularly significant in public policy efforts to address [childhood obesity](#) and reliance on parents to responsibly evaluate and filter the effects of food advertising.

"Adults are thought to have greater immunity to advertising effects relative to children due to their greater cognitive processing abilities," she said.

"As a result, existing [food advertising](#) regulations are focused primarily on limiting children's exposure to advertisements for junk food. But these regulations don't take into account the broader influence of the sheer quantity of [junk food](#) ads, which has the potential to normalise the consumption of these foods in a social sense.

"The results of our study indicate that advertising can lead both parents and children to evaluate these products more favourably and influence how desirable and acceptable they are."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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