

Healthy food marketing needed for parents

June 22 2015, by Michelle Wheeler



Just over half of the parents reported their children had soft drinks at least once a week and one in eight claimed their children drank them on a daily basis. Credit: ac10026

Marketing healthy food as tasty and convenient while limiting junk food advertisements could help improve children's diets and combat childhood obesity, according to a study of parents' attitudes towards unhealthy food and drinks.

The Curtin University-led study surveyed more than 1300 parents of [children](#) aged between 8 and 14 and found the majority perceived soft drinks and energy rich, nutrient-poor foods as enjoyable and convenient and they rated these factors above value for money or health considerations.

Food advertising and pester power also played a big role in parents' attitudes, with exposure to television [junk food](#) advertising and nagging children making parents more likely to think favourably of unhealthy products and buy them.

Behavioural scientist Simone Pettigrew, who led the nation-wide study, says we need to market healthy foods as tasty and convenient while at the same time embracing the slow food movement.

"It would be great if [[food preparation](#)] was positioned as something you do with your kids, that's a team building exercise and that is actually an enjoyable component of your day," she says.

Professor Pettigrew also used the survey to study factors affecting children's soft drink consumption, and found pestering, perceived social norms and parents' attitudes to soft drinks influenced the drinks' consumption.

Soft drink consumption probably higher than expected

Just over half of the parents reported their children had soft drinks at least once a week and one in eight claimed their children drank them on a daily basis.

Prof Pettigrew says these statistics are probably on the low side because

children's reporting of their own behaviour in other studies suggests soft drink consumption in Australia is even higher.

"Soft drinks really is the big bad, the big evil, because it's so full of yucky stuff and so deficient in any nutrients," she says.

"It's the one thing, if we could fix the national diet, getting rid of soft drinks would be a very, very good first place to start."

Prof Pettigrew says a lot of the blame is often placed on parents for giving their children junk food and [soft drinks](#) but most of the significant factors from the study were environmental things outside of parents' and children's control.

"If we can affect the amount of junk food advertising, if we can affect the idea that it's socially normal to consume this stuff and if we can develop a society in which [parents](#) are actually trained and given skills in managing pestering, then that would actually be a really big help," she says.

More information: "Dimensions of parents' attitudes to unhealthy foods and beverages," *Food Quality and Preference*, Volume 44, September 2015, Pages 179-182, ISSN 0950-3293, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2015.05.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2015.05.001)

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