

TV ads still push unhealthy foods at kids

November 6 2017



(HealthDay)—The number of food ads targeting American children has declined, but most of the ads they do see are for unhealthy foods, a new study finds.

Under a voluntary initiative launched in 2007, major food and beverage companies agreed to reduce unhealthy product advertising to [children](#) younger than 12.

The study found, though, that children still see 10 to 11 food-related TV ads a day, and most of them are for unhealthy items such as sugary drinks, [fast food](#), sweet and salty snacks and candy.

The researchers also found that most of the companies that agreed to the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) have ignored [public health](#) experts' suggestions to improve the initiative. Those have included:

- Strengthening nutrition standards for products companies claim are healthier choices that can be advertised directly to children,
- Expanding the initiative to include children up to at least 14 years old,
- Increasing the types of media covered by the initiative to include programming frequently watched by youngsters, as well as all forms of marketing that appeal to children, such as mobile apps with branded games and YouTube videos

The study, done by researchers at the University of Connecticut's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, was to be presented Monday at the American Public Health Association's annual meeting, in Atlanta.

"The food and beverage companies participating in the voluntary initiative should be recognized for actions they have taken to reduce advertising to children," said study lead author Jennifer Harris, director of marketing initiatives at the Rudd Center. "However, limitations in self-regulatory pledges allow companies to continue to advertise unhealthy products to children.

"Furthermore, increased advertising by companies that do not participate in CFBAI has offset much of the reduction in advertising by CFBAI companies, and children continue to view thousands of TV ads per year for unhealthy food and drinks, including ads for candy, snacks, [sugary drinks](#) and fast [food](#) that target them directly," Harris said in a university news release.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [children's nutrition](#).

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Citation: TV ads still push unhealthy foods at kids (2017, November 6) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-tv-ads-unhealthy-foods-kids.html>

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