

# Taking a bite out of food ads targeted to kids

February 25 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—Kids can be as strongly influenced by TV commercials as by the shows themselves, and many studies have found that tempting food ads have a particularly harmful effect, contributing to childhood

obesity.

While the government has stepped in with [nutrition guidelines](#) for manufacturers, these are largely voluntary and, therefore, not enforceable. So it's up to parents to be vigilant.

It might seem like the odds are stacked against you.

According to a study in the journal *Childhood Obesity*, most food and [beverage products](#) in ads seen by 2- to 11-year-olds during kids' programming don't meet the guidelines of the government's Interagency Working Group. The panel includes representatives of the Federal Trade Commission, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Agriculture.

Plus, less than half of TV ads during kids' programming meet the guidelines created by the food industry's own voluntary group, the study found.

While some companies have improved the nutritional quality of some of their foods, these aren't the products they're advertising. The vast majority of ads seen during children's programming are for products high in what dietary guidelines call "nutrients to limit"—fat, salt and sugar. The same is true for the more than 3 billion [food ads](#) that appear every year on popular websites for kids, according to research published in the journal *Pediatric Obesity*.

But you can counter the effects of tempting ads. Point out to your kids that the visuals are made to get them excited about the food, but the message may not be realistic. For instance, a cereal isn't going to give them super powers. Letting kids know about marketing will help them better evaluate merits of any product as they get older and start making their own healthy decisions.

Another key step is to keep their viewing in the family or living room so that you see what they see. A study done on [sugary drink consumption](#) found that a parent's positive influence was undermined when kids had a TV in their bedroom.

**More information:** Healthy Food America has more on [steps to limit the effects of ads](#) on your kids.

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