

# 86% of teens exposed to junk food ads on social media

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Young people are being exposed to junk food adverts across social media, streaming services and by celebrities and influencers, Cancer

Research UK findings show today.

They also continue to be exposed to advertising across traditional channels including TV, radio, print, billboards and special price offers.

Researchers asked 3,394 11- 19-year-olds from across the UK where they had seen advertising that month for food and drink high in fat, sugar and salt.

- 88% saw special offers for junk food
- 86% saw adverts for junk food on [social media](#)
- 84% saw adverts on TV
- 82% saw adverts on billboards
- 72% saw [famous people](#) in films, [music videos](#), on TV or in magazines with unhealthy food and drink
- 68% saw adverts on catch up and streaming
- 64% saw influencers promoting unhealthy foods
- 57% saw adverts in newspapers or magazines

The research, which took place before lockdown, also showed that [young people](#) who reported greater awareness of junk food marketing also consumed more food and drink high in fat, sugar and salt.

As media habits changed during the pandemic with children spending more time online and alone in their rooms, worryingly their exposure to this type of advertising may also have increased.

Obese children are five times more likely to remain obese into adulthood and being overweight or obese as an adult increases the risk of 13 different types of cancer.

Malcolm Clark, Cancer Research UK's senior policy manager, said:  
"Digital platforms provide rich pickings for junk food brands looking

for extra opportunities to tempt tech-savvy teenagers with their products. An end to online advertising of junk food would be a world-leading protective measure for young people's health and wellbeing and reduce their risk of developing diet-related diseases, including cancer, later in life.

"Turning the tap off the swathe of junk [food adverts](#) bombarding young people would help the UK Government reach its ambition of halving childhood obesity by 2030. It must follow through on its robust proposals and introduce legislation to restrict junk food marketing and promotions to protect the health of future generations."

Dev Sharma, 15, of Leicester, campaigns on this issue for BiteBack 2030 and wrote the report's foreword. He said: "Whatever industry says, the simple fact is my friends and I don't want to feel bombarded with junk food ads every day. We know there is a direct link between kids seeing ads and childhood obesity—and we need action.

"This matters so much to me because it's about my health. How can anyone be healthy when our whole digital environment is incredibly skewed and flooded to promote foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt?"

"The project's findings show that the UK Government must follow through on plans set out in the recent obesity strategy to restrict [junk food](#) marketing."

**More information:** Newman, A., et al. The HFSS beat goes on: Awareness of marketing for high fat, salt and/or sugar foods and the association with consumption in the 2017 and 2019 Youth Obesity Policy Surveys. 2020, Cancer Research UK

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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