

Santa should get off his sleigh and walk, says public health doctor

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Santa should share Rudolf's snack of carrots and celery sticks rather than brandy and mince pies and swap his reindeer for a bike or walk, says a public health expert in the Christmas issue published in BMJ today.

Dr Nathan Grills, from Monash University in Australia, says the current image of [Santa](#) promotes obesity, drink-driving, speeding and a general unhealthy lifestyle. He argues that "Santa only needs to affect health by 0.1% to damage millions of lives" and that it would be better if his popularity was used to promote healthy living.

Grills carried out a review of literature and web-based material to assess Santa's potential negative impact on [public health](#) - there were no peer reviewed publications on this issue.

The investigation revealed very high Santa awareness amongst children. Indeed among American school kids Santa Claus was the only fictional character more highly recognised than Ronald McDonald, says the paper.

Grills also found that "Santa sells, and sometimes he sells harmful products" and this happens on a global scale. "Like Coca-Cola, Santa has become a major export item to the developing world", says the author.

While Santa is now banned from smoking, images of him enjoying a pipe or cigar can still be found on Christmas cards. Father Christmas also potentially promotes drink-driving, argues Grills, and refers to the

tradition of leaving Santa Claus a brandy to wish him well on his travel, with a few billion houses to visit Santa would soon be over the limit, says the study.

Also, Santa has real potential to spread [infectious diseases](#), says the paper. If Santa sneezes or coughs around 10 times a day, all the children who sit on his lap may end up with [swine flu](#) as well as their [Christmas](#) present, argues Grills.

While more research is needed before calling for authorities to regulate Santa's activities, Grills proposes a new image for Santa - a slimmed down version on a treadmill.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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