

# Parents the target of deceptive food ads, study says

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Commercials that misstate benefits of sugary products concern researchers.

(HealthDay)—Parents are the target of many misleading television ads for children's foods and drinks, new research indicates.

For the study, published online Nov. 9 in the journal *Pediatrics*, researchers analyzed TV commercials for children's foods and beverages that aired over one year in the United States.

Most were for unhealthy products, such as sweetened cereals and sugary drinks, which came as no surprise, the researchers said.

What did surprise the researchers was that many of the commercials were directed at parents and featured lifestyle themes such as family bonding. For example, they found that 73 percent of total airtime for ads featuring children's sugar-sweetened drinks targeted parents.

All of the parent-targeted ads for children's [sugary drinks](#) included messages about nutrition or health benefits, even though such products are linked with obesity, dental decay and other health problems, the researchers pointed out.

"This marketing strategy consists of a one-two punch, with the children's ads aiming to increase the likelihood of a purchase request from the child, and the parent advertising aiming to undermine the parent's ability to say 'no' to the request," senior study author Diane Gilbert-Diamond said in a journal news release.

How this might affect the family's eating patterns isn't known.

"We need to determine how these advertising messages might undermine the ability of parents to identify healthy foods for their [children](#)," study lead author Jennifer Emond said in the news release. Emond is a research instructor in the department of epidemiology at the School of Medicine at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H.

**More information:** The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers advice about getting children to be [healthy eaters](#).

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