

TV food adverts increase obese children's appetite by 134 percent

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Obese and overweight children increase their food intake by more than 100% after watching food advertisements on television; a study by the University of Liverpool psychologists has shown.

A group of 60 children of varying weights, aged between nine and eleven years was shown a series of both food television adverts and toy adverts, followed by a cartoon. Food intake following the food adverts was significantly higher compared with the toy adverts in all weight groups, with the obese children increasing their consumption by 134%; overweight children by 101% and normal weight children by 84%.

It was also found that weight dictated food preference during the experiment. Food of differing fat contents was made available to the children to eat at their own will, ranging from high fat sweet snacks to low fat savoury products. The obese group consistently chose the highest fat product - chocolate - whereas the overweight children chose jelly sweets which have a lower fat content, as well as chocolate.

Dr Jason Halford, Director of the University's Kissileff Human Ingestive Behaviour Laboratory commented: "Our research confirms food TV advertising has a profound effect on all children's eating habits – doubling their consumption rate. The study was also particularly interesting in suggesting a strong connection between weight and susceptibility to over-eating when exposed to food adverts on television."

In this country, 14% of children are classed as obese and the average UK child watches 17 hours of commercial television a week. A ban on junk food advertising around children's television programmes was introduced in the UK in January 2007 yet surveys have shown that many children still watch during 'family viewing' hours in the evening when the ban does not apply.

The University research team is presenting its research at the European Congress on Obesity in Budapest this week.

Future studies are planned to investigate whether enhanced responsiveness to food adverts or the greater amount of television children are watching is a predictor of childhood obesity.

Source: University of Liverpool

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