# Brief junk food adverts boost children's calorie intake despite new UK rules



Recent research has highlighted a concerning trend: even brief exposure to junk food advertising can lead children to consume significantly more calories later in the day. A study involving 240 children aged between seven and fifteen, conducted across schools in Merseyside, found that just five minutes of viewing junk food ads resulted in an average increase of 130 calories consumed, regardless of whether the advertisements showed specific food items or merely brand logos. This phenomenon demonstrates the powerful influence of branding on young minds, who, even before starting school, can identify and display preferences for well-known fast food outlets such as McDonald’s and KFC.

The findings were presented by Professor Emma Boyland, a leading figure in food marketing and child health at Liverpool University, at the European Obesity Congress in Malaga, Spain. Boyland stated, “This is the first study to show that brand-only food advertising affects what children eat… that type of advertising, which is becoming more frequent, does affect children’s food intake.” This assertion underscores a troubling loophole in the UK government’s upcoming advertising restrictions, set to take effect in October, which aim to ban junk food adverts on television before 9pm. Experts argue that brand-only advertising, likely exempt from these new regulations, poses a significant risk to children’s health, as companies can still promote their logos and branding extensively.

Katharine Jenner, director of the Obesity Health Alliance, expressed her concerns about the persistence of these loopholes. She noted that while new regulations may limit unhealthy food advertising on television and online, brands will still find ways to connect with young audiences through billboards and public transport platforms. This has particular implications for children who are already living with obesity, making them especially susceptible to marketing strategies that encourage unhealthy eating habits.

Additional research corroborates these findings. Studies from institutions such as the University of Wollongong and Yale University have shown that children exposed to food advertising on television can consume nearly 50 extra calories each day, leading to potential weight gain over time. Similarly, findings from a study indicate a link between junk food ads and increased snacking rates among both children and adults, suggesting that the implications of these marketing techniques extend beyond the immediate context.

Efforts to combat childhood obesity in the UK highlight a stark reality: one in five children is classified as obese by Year 6. Initiatives such as the Chefs in Schools programme aim to provide nutritious meals, yet they coexist with a landscape where unhealthy food marketing remains prevalent. Despite plans for regulatory changes targeting junk food advertising, substantial work remains to address the depths of this public health issue adequately.

Dr Helen Stewart, an officer for health improvement at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, emphasised the need for robust measures to tackle the childhood obesity crisis. She stated, “Reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food advertising is a crucial step in curbing rising obesity levels. Every child should be given the chance to grow up healthy and happy.” As the government prepares to enforce advertising restrictions, the challenge lies in ensuring that these measures effectively shield children from the influence of powerful branding and marketing tactics.

The government's approach, outlined by a spokesperson, acknowledges the necessity of addressing junk food marketing targeted at children while promoting healthier food options. They suggest that by allowing companies to market healthier alternatives, they can start shifting the focus toward better dietary habits among children, ultimately aiming to alleviate the burdens of obesity on public health services.

However, unless the government addresses existing loopholes that allow for extensive branding without accountability, the battle against childhood obesity may be jeopardised. The urgency of implementing a comprehensive strategy that curtails not only explicit junk food marketing but also the subtle yet pervasive influence of brand imagery on children is essential to fostering a healthier future generation.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
2. Paragraph 3
3. Paragraphs 4, 5
4. Paragraphs 5, 6
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraphs 3, 5
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/just-five-minutes-exposure-junk-35203800> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.uow.edu.au/media/2018/junk-food-ads-lead-to-overeating-capable-of-driving-unhealthy-weight-gain-in-children-new-study-finds.php> - A study by the University of Wollongong found that children who watched food advertising consumed nearly 50 extra calories daily, leading to potential weight gain over time. The research highlights the direct influence of food marketing on children's calorie intake and emphasizes the need for greater regulation to combat childhood obesity.
3. <https://news.yale.edu/2009/07/01/tv-food-advertising-increases-snacking-and-potential-weight-gain-children-and-adults> - Yale University researchers discovered that food advertising on television increases automatic snacking in both children and adults. In one experiment, children ate 45% more snack food while watching a show with food commercials compared to those watching the same show with non-food commercials. This suggests that even brief exposure to food ads can lead to significant increases in calorie consumption.
4. <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-care-news/articles/2018-05-22/study-teens-exposed-to-more-junk-food-ads-eat-more-junk-food> - A study found that teens exposed to more junk food advertising consumed up to 350 additional calories weekly. The research indicates that increased exposure to junk food ads is linked to higher consumption of unhealthy foods among adolescents, contributing to the rising rates of childhood obesity.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/b5035c40-a6ed-4a88-8b8e-1e245f1473e9> - The Financial Times reports on the junk food crisis in the UK, highlighting that one in five children are classified as obese by Year 6. Initiatives like the Chefs in Schools programme aim to combat this by providing nutritious meals, improving students' health and academic performance. The article also discusses government measures such as sugar taxes and advertising restrictions to address this public health issue.
6. <https://www.axios.com/2018/03/26/junk-food-sports-sponsors-may-be-adding-to-child-obesity> - A group of scientists has urged sports organizations to promote healthier food and drink options in their sponsorships to combat childhood obesity. Their study, published in Pediatrics, found that 76% of sports sponsors advertised low-nutrient foods and 52% promoted sugar-sweetened beverages. The study highlights the need for more responsible marketing practices in sports to protect children's health.
7. <https://time.com/3832251/food-advertised-to-kids/> - A study published in Preventing Chronic Disease reveals that over half of food products advertised on TV programs aimed at children do not meet U.S. recommended nutrition guidelines. The research compares products approved by the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) to standards from the Interagency Working Group (IWG), highlighting the need for companies to promote healthier products to align advertisements with health recommendations for kids.