# five minutes of junk food ads prompt kids to eat extra calories, study finds



Research presented at the European Congress on Obesity in Malaga has revealed a startling connection between the marketing of unhealthy foods and increased calorie consumption among children. According to the study, just five minutes of exposure to junk food advertising can lead children aged seven to 15 to consume an additional 130 calories a day—roughly equivalent to a small chocolate bar. This alarming finding highlights the concerning influence of advertising across various platforms, including social media, television, and podcasts, on children's dietary behaviours.

The lead author, Professor Emma Boyland from the University of Liverpool, noted that “Even short exposure to marketing of foods high in fat, salt, and sugar can drive excess calorie consumption and potentially weight gain, particularly in young people who are more susceptible to advertising and whose eating patterns influence their lifelong health.” The study involved 240 children, and the analysis showed a clear pattern: after viewing advertisements for foods high in saturated fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS), children consumed more snacks and meals than after being exposed to non-food ads. Those with a higher body mass index demonstrated an even greater responsiveness to these advertisements.

The urgency of mitigating such marketing impacts is reinforced by rising childhood obesity rates in the UK, where one in five children are classified as obese by Year 6. Current government initiatives, including a ban on the targeting of junk food advertisements at children, aim to curb this trend. Set to take effect in October, the ban will restrict advertising for less healthy foods on television during prime hours and in online paid promotions. Campaigners argue that these measures are essential for addressing public health concerns exacerbated by easy access to cheap, unhealthy food, particularly among low-income families.

Despite such regulatory efforts, challenges remain. The food industry has resisted numerous proposals to limit marketing for ultra-processed foods, which have been linked to debilitating health outcomes, including obesity, diabetes, and cancer. Lobbying efforts have resulted in a significant regulatory backlash—outpacing even the tobacco and alcohol industries in their resistance. Countries such as Belgium and Israel are now pointing to ultra-processed foods in dietary guidelines, yet the global regulatory landscape remains inconsistent, often targeting junk food marketing only at vulnerable populations.

Similar studies from Canada further underline the need for urgent action. A recent assessment indicated that over half of Canadian children are exposed to unhealthy food marketing across digital platforms, with social media being the predominant medium. Fast food promotions accounted for a substantial portion of this exposure, raising alarms about the pervasive influence of digital marketing on young audiences. The critical role of social media influencers in promoting unhealthy options, particularly among children aged 10 to 12 years, has prompted calls for government interventions to include these newer marketing channels in regulatory measures.

All these findings converge on a singular conclusion: urgent policies are required to limit the exposure of children to unhealthy food marketing across all platforms—be it traditional media or emerging digital spaces. The delicate balance involves ensuring children have access to nutritious options while regulating the environments that encourage unhealthy eating habits, thus shaping healthier generations for the future.

The government’s upcoming advertising ban aligns with a growing consensus that more robust strategies are essential to combat the detrimental health implications of junk food marketing. As we move toward implementing such policies, the implications for public health could be significant, potentially stalling the rising rates of childhood obesity and fostering a healthier, more informed generation.

### Reference Map

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

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/junk-food-adverts-ban-children-b2748552.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.ft.com/content/b5035c40-a6ed-4a88-8b8e-1e245f1473e9> - This article discusses the alarming rates of child obesity in the UK, with one in five children 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. Rising healthy food prices and cheap, accessible junk food contribute to the problem, especially among low-income families. Government measures like sugar taxes, advertising restrictions, and universal free school meals are being proposed and implemented to address this public health crisis. Campaigners emphasize the need for stronger policies, higher food standards, and better enforcement to ensure children receive nutritious meals, particularly in deprived areas disproportionately affected by the junk food influx.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/0b9ad138-1867-439f-96a5-7986d5aa66ae> - This article examines the resistance from the food industry to regulations on ultra-processed foods (UPFs), which have been linked to obesity, cancer, and diabetes. Despite lower consumption of traditional unhealthy ingredients like sugar and oil, obesity in Brazil rose due to increased consumption of highly processed foods. The food industry has lobbied intensely against regulations, spending twice as much as tobacco and alcohol industries combined in 2023, while casting doubt on scientific research. Some countries like Belgium, Israel, and Brazil have begun referencing UPFs in dietary guidelines, but widespread regulatory acceptance remains limited. Public health experts advocate for nuanced, supportive policies for home cooking and healthier diets, amidst concerns over stigmatizing socioeconomic groups reliant on packaged foods.
* <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-024-19094-5> - This study assesses the exposure of Canadian children and adolescents to unhealthy food marketing across digital platforms. The findings indicate that 51% of youth were exposed to food marketing, with children averaging 1.96 marketing instances per 30 minutes and adolescents 2.56 instances per 30 minutes. Social media platforms accounted for 83% of this exposure, followed by mobile games at 13%. Fast food was the most promoted food category (22%), and nearly 90% of all marketing instances were considered less healthy according to Health Canada’s proposed 2018 Nutrient Profile Model. The study concludes that the high exposure to unhealthy food marketing on digital media platforms warrants government regulation to protect these vulnerable populations.
* <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-024-01589-4> - This research examines the role of social media influencers in promoting unhealthy food and beverages to Canadian children on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The study analyzed 2,232 posts from nine top influencers popular among children aged 10–12 years between June 2021 and May 2022. The results show that YouTube had the highest average rate of food marketing instances per post, with fast food restaurants being the most promoted food category (21%). The majority of products promoted were classified as less healthy according to Health Canada’s Nutrient Profile Model. The study emphasizes the significant role of social media influencers in exposing children to unhealthy food marketing and advocates for including social media and influencer marketing in government-led marketing restrictions to protect this vulnerable demographic.
* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35301815/> - This systematic review investigates the influence of unhealthy food and beverage marketing through social media and advergaming on diet-related outcomes in children. The review included 26 studies, with 20 examining advergaming and six focusing on social media. The findings suggest that such marketing significantly affects children's pester behaviors, food choices, and food intake. The study highlights the need for policies targeting screen-based marketing to mitigate these effects and protect children's health.
* <https://www.obesityevidencehub.org.au/collections/prevention/the-impact-of-food-marketing-on-children> - This resource provides key evidence on the impact of food marketing on children. It highlights that Australian children aged 5 to 8 years are exposed to at least 827 unhealthy food advertisements on television each year, and adolescents are exposed to almost 100 promotions per week from online sources. The resource also notes that children aged 4 to 6 years believe a product tastes better if it has a cartoon character on the pack, and those aged 10 to 14 years think food and drink sponsors of their local sports clubs are ‘cool’ and like to return the favor by buying their products. The resource emphasizes the need for effective restrictions on unhealthy food marketing to protect children's health.