Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children

Although children’s food choices are affected by many factors, food marketing plays a key role. Studies show that food marketing attracts children’s attention, influences their food choices, and prompts them to request that their parents purchase products.

Marketing techniques

When marketing foods to children, companies should:

Product characteristics and overall messages

- **Support parents’ efforts** to serve as the gatekeepers of sound nutrition for their children and not undermine parental authority. Marketers should not encourage children to nag their parents to buy low-nutrition foods.
- Depict and package/serve food in **reasonable portion sizes and not encourage overeating** directly or indirectly.
- **Develop new products** that help children eat healthfully, especially with regard to nutrient density, energy density, and portion size.
- **Reformulate** products to improve their nutritional quality, including adding more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and reducing portion sizes, calories, sodium, refined sugars, and saturated and trans fats.
- **Expand efforts to promote healthy eating habits** consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and to promote **healthful products**, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat milk. Do not portray healthful foods negatively.

Specific marketing techniques and incentives

- Should not advertise nutritionally poor choices during **television** shows: 1) with more than 15% of the audience under age 12; 2) for which children are identified as the target audience by the television station, entertainment company, or movie studio; or 3) that are kid-oriented cartoons.
- Should not use **product or brand placements** for low-nutrition foods in media aimed at children, such as movies, television shows, video games, websites, books, and textbooks.
- Only offer **premiums and incentives** (such as toys, trading cards, apparel, club memberships, products for points, contests, reduced-price specials, or coupons) with foods, meals, and brands that meet the nutrition criteria described above.
- Use/allow **licensing agreements or cross-promotions** (such as with movies, television programmes, or video games) or use **cartoon/fictional characters or celebrities** from television, movies, music, or sports to market to children only those
foods that meet the above nutrition criteria. This includes depictions on food packages, in ads, as premiums, and for in-store promotions.

- Should not put logos, brand names, spokes-characters, product names, or other marketing for low-nutrition foods/brands on baby bottles, children’s apparel, books, toys, dishware, or other merchandise made specifically for children.

- Incorporate into games (such as board, Internet, or video games), toys, or books only those products and brands that meet the nutrition criteria.

- Use sponsorship of sporting, school, and other events for children only with brands and foods that meet the above nutrition criteria.

- Should not exploit children’s natural tendency to play by building entertainment value into low-nutrition foods (for example, products such as mechanical lollipops, food shaped like cartoon characters, or sugary drink mixes that turn to surprise colours).

Additional guidance for schools

- Schools are a unique setting. Parents entrust their children into schools’ care for a large proportion of children’s waking hours. Also schools are dedicated to children’s education and are supported by tax dollars. Companies should support healthy eating in schools and not market, sell, or give away low-nutrition foods or brands anywhere on school campuses, including through:
  - Logos, brand names, spokes-characters, product names, or other product marketing on/in vending machines; books, curricula, and other educational materials; school supplies; posters; textbook covers; and school property such as scoreboards, signs, athletic fields, buses, and buildings
  - Educational incentive programmes that provide food as a reward (for example, earning a coupon for a free pizza after reading a certain number of books)
  - Incentive programmes that provide schools with money or school supplies when families buy a company’s food products
  - In-school television, such as Channel One
  - Direct sale of low-nutrition foods
  - Free samples or coupons
  - School fundraising activities
  - Banner ads or wallpaper on school computers

Additional guidance for retail stores (such as grocery, toy, convenience, and video stores)

- Replace low-nutrition foods with more healthful foods or non-food items at checkout aisles or counters.

- Do not position in-store displays for low-nutrition foods or place low-nutrition products on shelves at young children’s eye level.

- Cluster cookies, chips, candy, soda, and other food categories that are predominantly of poor nutritional quality in a few designated aisles of grocery stores to allow parents to skip those aisles if they choose.
Companies should not use the following approaches to market any foods (irrespective of the nutritional quality of the food being marketed)

- Should not show children engaged in other activities (like skateboarding, playing soccer, watching television, etc.) while eating.
- Should not mislead children regarding the emotional, social, or health benefits of a product or exploit children’s developmental vulnerabilities and emotions to market any food, including:
  - Should not use physical activity or images of healthful foods (such as fruits and vegetables) to market any low-nutrition food.
  - Should not link children’s self-image to the consumption of any foods/brands, use peer pressure, or arouse unrealistic expectations related to consuming/purchasing a food (for example, implying that a child will be more physically fit, more accepted by peers, happier, or more popular if he buys a food/brand or goes to a certain restaurant).
  - Should not market any food by modelling rebellion against parents or by portraying parents, teachers, or other authority figures in negative roles.
  - Should not suggest that an adult who buys a child a certain product is more loving, generous, or otherwise better than an adult who does not.