Television food advertising and the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity: a multicountry comparison

Increasing attention is being given to the effect between television viewing and prevalence of overweight and obesity. Two mechanisms are at-play here: reduced physical activity and a simultaneous increase in energy intake. Additionally, there is increasing evidence that television food advertising influences children’s food preferences as well as food intake. The aim of this study was to quantify and compare the effect of television food advertising on the prevalence of overweight and obesity in 6-11 years-old children in Australia, Great Britain (England and Scotland only), Italy, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United States.

The seven studies that were available for analysis revealed a noticeable effect of television food advertising exposure on the prevalence of overweight and obesity in all six countries. The study consequently suggests that in some countries, the reduction in television food advertising might substantially decrease the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity.