Unhealthy and Unregulated Food Advertising and Marketing to Children

The American Heart Association finds no justification for manipulative advertising and marketing practices to children and supports efforts to restrict these practices in the U.S.

Constant exposure to television and electronic media

Children are constantly exposed to advertising and marketing through television, the internet, magazines, schools, product placements, video games, cell phones, and other means. These advertisements are designed to boost brand recognition and sales, more often for unhealthy, high-calorie foods.

Young children ages 12 and under are especially vulnerable to these marketing and advertising strategies because they are developmentally less able to comprehend their intent.

The Association recommends

The American Heart Association supports policy change that addresses the following efforts to limit the marketing and advertising of low-nutrient, high calorie foods and beverages to U.S. children.

- Only healthy foods, such as fruit, 100% fruit juice, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole grain foods should be advertised and marketed to children. Implicit in this recommendation is that foods that are advertised meet criteria that the association has set for nutrients that affect cardiovascular disease risk, such as saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, fibre. These healthy foods and beverages should be the default options in children’s meals whenever possible.
- Product placement of food brands should be discouraged in multiple media technologies including movies, videogames, advergaming, social networking sites, cell phones, podcasts, and television programming geared toward children.
- Toy companies and the movie industry should not be able to partner with fast food companies to market unhealthy meals to children.
- Licensed characters should only be used to market healthy foods to children.
- Advertising should include positive messages promoting good nutrition and physical activity.
- Advertising, marketing, and brand awareness strategies used by industry should not be allowed in schools or in educational materials.