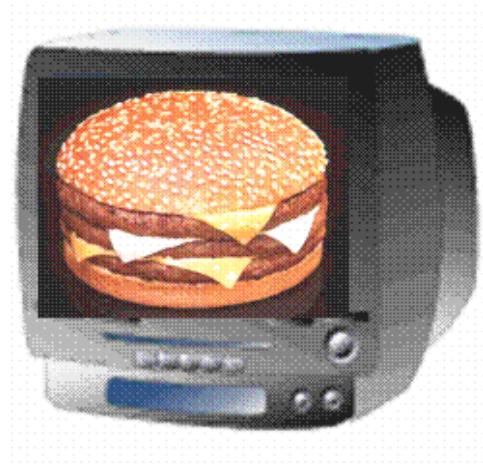


What are we feeding our children?



A Junk Food
Advertising Audit



by the Australian Divisions of General Practice

February 2003



NATIONAL DIVISIONS YOUTH ALLIANCE
GPs working with young people



ADGP Audit of Junk Food Advertising

About ADGP

Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) is the peak national body representing 121 Divisions of General Practice across Australia. About 94 per cent of GPs are members of a local Division of General Practice.

Divisions are funded by the Commonwealth to support general practice to deliver high quality care to the Australian community. General practice is the core of Australia's health system. Around 90 per cent of Australians visit their GP each year, and these visits are the gateway to the country's hospital, specialist and diagnostic services.

General practice plays a major role in childhood immunisation, management of chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes, identifying and treating mental illness, and working with indigenous communities in remote parts of Australia.

Through linking GPs in local areas, Divisions are the voice of general practice in the community, with the concerns and views of GPs in day-to-day practice being passed through local divisions to the State Based Organisations and ADGP, which in turn presents those views to Federal and State Governments.

ADGP is one of Australia's largest representative voices for general practitioners. As part of ADGP's representation program, grass roots GPs sit on approximately 60 key decision-making bodies in the health sector, having direct input into general practice financing, GP workforce and training, clinical practice and practice management and other key areas influencing the future of general practice.

Within the community, Divisions are central to the integration of general practice with other health sectors – pharmacy, hospitals, and community and area health services.

ADGP also coordinates a number of National Programs through Divisions of General Practice to improve the health of all Australians. ADGP's programs cover a broad range of primary care issues, including immunisation, mental health and practice nursing. These programs aim to strengthen primary health care to better meet the needs of the Australian community.

ADGP also auspices the National Divisions Youth Alliance (NDYA) a national youth health program that aims to improve the health of young people in Australia through the active participation of GPs and Divisions of General Practice. NDYA is working to strengthen the ability of GPs and Divisions to respond to the health needs of young people through national collaboration.

ADGP is governed by a Board of Directors comprising two GPs from each State and one GP from each Territory. Half the Directors are GPs working in rural areas of Australia. There is also a consumer representative who sits on the Board as an observer, nominated by the Consumers' Health Forum.

Through supporting GPs and advocating on behalf of general practice, the Australian Divisions of General Practice has become a vital part of Australia's primary health care system.

ADGP Junk Food Advertising Audit - Summary of Results

To determine the extent of junk food advertising that Australian children are exposed to on television ADGP recorded and analysed 50 hours of child-targeted television on commercial television stations during the January holiday period 2003.

This audit included programs scheduled during the early morning, afternoon and on Saturday morning. An equal number of hours from each commercial channel was analysed. The focus of the audit was on programs targeting children aged approximately 5 to 15.

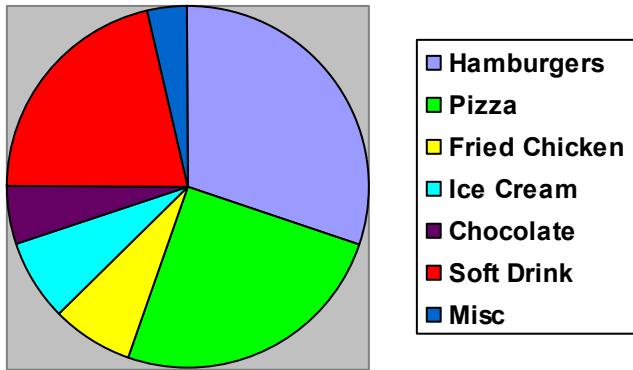
ADGP's analysis of this data provides information about the level and type of junk food advertising that Australian children are exposed to via the television. It is a valuable source of data that can be used to inform policies on junk food advertising to children.

Main Findings

The audit found that during children's television programs there was an average of one junk food advertisement per ad break – in some cases up to three advertisements per ad break for different types of junk food.

Over 99% of food advertisements broadcast during children's TV programming were for junk food (food high in fat, sugar and/or salt with little nutritional value). The main categories of foods advertised were (in descending order): fast food (hamburgers, pizza and fried chicken); soft drink; ice cream; and chocolate confectionery.

Summary of Junk Food Advertising by Food Category



Hamburger takeaway/fast food 30%
Pizza take away/fast food 25%
Soft drink 22%
Fried chicken fast food/takeaway 7%
Ice cream products 7%
Chocolate confectionery 5%
Miscellaneous 4%

TV Network Differences

ADGP found no major difference between television channels in the level or type of advertising. All commercial channels had similar levels of junk food advertising during children's peak viewing times.

Disturbingly, there were no "healthy eating" messages broadcast during this time that promoted the benefits of a healthy and balanced diet. This means that children are receiving an overwhelmingly distorted message about diet from commercial television.

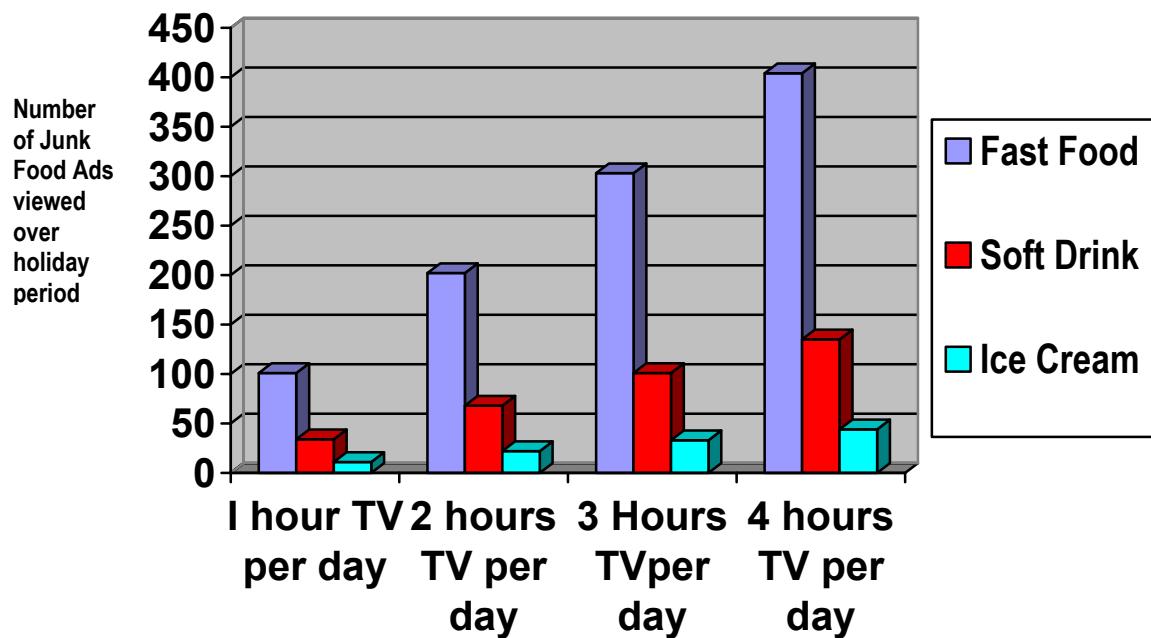
Number of Junk Food Advertisements

ADGP analysed the data to determine the number of advertisements for junk food children would have been exposed to over the six week Summer holiday period. This analysis showed that children watching an average amount of two and half hours of television per day would have been exposed to 406 advertising messages encouraging them to eat junk food during this six week period. This equates to a total of 3 hours and 22 minutes of junk food advertising – the equivalent of one and a half full-length movies of junk food ads.

The 406 advertisements included 252 advertisements for fast food (including hamburgers, pizza and fried chicken); 84 advertisements for soft drinks; and 28 for ice cream products.

A child watching four hours of television per day over the six week holiday period would have seen a total of 649 junk food ads including 404 advertisements for fast food; 135 advertisements for soft drinks; and 44 for ice cream products.

Number of Junk Food Ads seen per child over holiday period



Given that the National Health and Medical Research Council has found that even a 30 second exposure to food advertising can alter children's food preferences, this high level of exposure to junk food advertising is extremely concerning.

Childhood Obesity

As a peak body representing GPs, ADGP is aware of the increasing incidence of obesity among Australian children and the impact that this is having on the health of our population.

Obesity is a risk factor for the two biggest killers of Australians today - heart disease and stroke - and disease processes for these conditions are starting to develop in our children in their formative years.

ADGP Junk Food Advertising Audit

GPs report seeing more children than ever before with Type 2 Diabetes – a disease associated with a poor diet and lack of exercise. The increase in Type 2 Diabetes has serious health, social and economic consequences for our future.

High rates of obesity among Australian children can also result in decreased motor skills, increased social problems and a reduced life expectancy.

Strategies to Reduce Childhood Obesity

ADGP supports a multi-faceted strategy to reduce the numbers of overweight and obese children in Australia. This strategy needs to involve doctors, parents, teachers, all levels of government and other influential groups in the community.

This strategy needs to focus on improving eating habits and increasing physical activity among young people. It must encompass specific initiatives to educate children about the benefits of a healthy and nutritious diet and to encourage them to be more physically active.

Junk Food Advertising Ban

ADGP is concerned that the high level of junk food advertising in the media is undermining the efforts of parents, teachers, doctors and health authorities to teach children healthy eating habits. Children are being given a distorted message about healthy diets through advertising and this makes it more difficult for them and their parents to make healthy food choices.

Advertising plays an important role in influencing children's behaviour. We cannot expect children who are exposed to high levels of sophisticated marketing of junk food to have an accurate view about what makes up a healthy and balanced diet. Children do not have the same capacity as adults to distinguish between factual information and promotional messages. In fact, research has shown that young children are unable to discriminate between TV programs and advertising.

Junk food advertisements make junk food seem attractive and appealing and do not give children a balanced message about diet. This makes it harder to sell a message about healthy eating to children.

Advertising during children's TV programs is particularly influential. Research carried out by the Independent Television Commission in the UK found that the effectiveness of advertising on children increased when the ads are shown in between or around child-targeted TV programs.

Food advertising during meal times is more likely to influence eating patterns than advertising at other times. During the 4pm-7pm peak children's viewing time, children typically will eat an after school snack and the evening meal. Studies conducted in the United States found that children who view television as a normal part of their meal routine have poorer dietary habits than those who don't.

ADGP supports a ban on junk food advertising during children's television programs and other media targeted at children. This ban would reduce the exposure of children to messages promoting foods with little nutritional value and support the efforts of parents, teachers, doctors and governments to educate children about the benefits of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Facts about TV Food Advertising to Children

Television is an important source of information for children.

Australian children watch more television than children in almost every other country. The average Australian child between the ages of 5 and 12 watches 2 hours 31 minutes of television every day. By the age of 18, the average Australian child will have spent more hours watching television than attending school. There is no doubt that TV is a powerful medium of information and education for children.

Concentration of food ads

Research studies have found that on average 34% of advertising on TV is for food products, primarily junk food. A 13 industrialised-nation study of advertising during children's TV viewing times found that Australia recorded the highest number of food ads per hour. TV food ads during children's viewing times disproportionately promote foods of low nutritional value - foods high in fat, sugar or salt.

Sophisticated and aggressive advertising techniques

Techniques used by TV food advertisers include prizes, give-aways, animation, special effects, story vignettes, jingles, and popular personalities. The predominant messages put out to children relate to having fun and being cool when eating junk food.

Food advertising to children gives children a skewed message about what foods are 'good to eat'. They almost completely contradict nutrition messages promoted by health practitioners, teachers and parents.

By the age of 18, the average Australian child will have spent more hours watching television than attending school.

Children's vulnerability to persuasion

Children below the age of about seven to eight have little comprehension of the persuasive intent of commercials. They are not developmentally capable of discerning the biases and exaggerations contained within advertisements. To that extent, they are susceptible to being 'deceived' by ads.

Children's health

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report found that 18% of boys and 22% of girls are overweight or obese. The percentage of Australian children who are overweight or obese has doubled in the last ten years.

Effects of Obesity

The increase in the numbers of overweight and obese children is resulting in a number of serious health problems such as an increase in the incidence of Type 2 Diabetes among Australian children.

A study of more than 12,000 Australian children has found lack of exercise and obesity are becoming serious problems in schools. This research found children are carrying more weight and have decreased motor coordination skills compared to a similar study in 1985.

Over the long term, high rates of obesity among children are likely to lead to high rates of heart disease, some forms of cancer and stroke.

Children's Diet

The 1995 National Nutrition Survey found an alarming proportion of children consuming non-nutritious foods and not enough children consuming healthy foods. The non-nutritious foods consumed by children, eg. hamburgers, pizza, confectionery, soft drinks, are also those promoted heavily during children's TV viewing times.

Financial Cost of Obesity

Recent research has found that Type Two Diabetes is costing Australia \$3 billion a year. As the rate of Type Two Diabetes increases this figure will grow. Obesity is also associated with higher levels of illness which increases health care costs to the community and lowers productivity.

Community concern

Several surveys conducted with the Australian community (including parents) have shown that the community is concerned about TV food advertising to children. These surveys demonstrated consistently strong community opinion in favour of tighter controls of TV food advertising to children.

The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children

ADGP supports the Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC). CFAC aims to enhance the health of Australian children through improvements to television food advertising directed at children.

CFAC comprises government, non-government, professional organisations and individuals who have an interest and responsibility to promote healthy eating for children.

The founding members of CFAC are:

- Dr. Rosemary Stanton
- Royal Australian College of Physicians. Division of Paediatrics
- Women's & Children's Hospital, Adelaide
- Young Media Australia
- Institute for Child Health Research
- Australian Consumers Association
- Public Health Association of Australia
- Dietitians Association of Australia
- Heart Foundation, Queensland
- Nutrition Australia, Queensland
- Dept Public Health, Flinders Uni SA
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead
- Dr. Kate Steinbeck, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney
- Professor Freda Briggs, University of South Australia

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NATIONAL DIVISIONS YOUTH ALLIANCE

GPs working with young people

Introduction to the National Divisions Youth Alliance

The National Divisions Youth Alliance (NDYA) is a new program, managed under the auspice of the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP). The NDYA aims to work in partnership with GPs, the Divisions network, young people and other stakeholders, to support general practice in improving health outcomes for young people.

Participation in NDYA is open to stakeholder organisations and individuals with an interest in youth health issues and who support the vision, mission and objectives of NDYA.

NDYA Vision

Improved health of young people in Australia through the active participation of GPs and Divisions of General Practice.

NDYA Mission

To strengthen the ability of GPs and Divisions to respond to the health needs of young people through national collaboration.

Objectives

SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL GENERAL PRACTITIONERS to effectively address the health needs of young people.

ASSIST DIVISIONS OF GENERAL PRACTICE to work with GPs in treating young people and developing innovative strategies and services to address youth health needs in local areas.

YOUTH HEALTH ADVOCACY AND PROMOTION on youth health issues and the health status of young people.

DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS with other organisations and individuals to produce sustainable and broad-ranging outcomes in youth health.

SUCCESSFUL ADMINISTRATION OF NDYA including the Secretariat of the NDYA Management Committee and National Reference Group.

The History of NDYA

The NDYA had its beginnings in 1997, as an email group for GPs and Divisions of General Practice staff members interested in youth health issues and/or actively engaged in youth health programs within their Divisions.

A groundswell of support within Divisions highlighted the need for a national body to increase the profile of youth health within General Practice, and resource the Divisions and their members with information, strategies and support for best practice in delivering health services to young people. The development of a proposal for the establishment of NDYA was progressed by a committed group of GPs and Divisions staff.

For more information visit the NDYA website: <http://ndya.adgp.com.au>

NDYA: GPs working with young people



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