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Influence of television advertisements and eating habits of children

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Abstract

In general, people hold the perception that TV would play a vital role in preparing children physically and psychologically for school. In contrast, today the effect of television on children has become a growing concern to many due to its effect on children's behavior, health, and cognitive development and learning.

Children and adolescents spend a considerable amount of time watching television. As a result, youth are exposed to a large number of food and beverage advertisements each day.

TV advertising influences the food preferences, purchase requests and diets of children under the age of 12 years.

As soon as they watch advertisements on Television or food commercials young children are more likely to increase their caloric intake and snack foods. This means there is significant association between fast food advertising and child body mass index.

However it is more effective when parents impose restrictions of advertising exposure to pre-school and early elementary school children than to older children.

The findings provide insights into the potential effectiveness of alternative media interventions to counteract the unhealthy influence of television on diet, including nutrition education, parental communication and media literacy education to teach children to defend against unwanted influence, and reduced exposure to unhealthy messages through advertisements.

Keywords: Food preferences, advertising, parental communication, unwanted influence

Introduction

It is generally observed that children watch a great deal of TV during the school season: children watch as early as when they wake up in the morning, then during lunchtime (after returning from school), and then again after completing their homework from 5 pm to 9 pm or 10 pm.

This large amount of exposure is concerning, especially because the focus groups revealed that children (1) recall a number of TV advertisements involving food items, (2) request food items seen on TV, and (3) are able to buy food for themselves, which usually involves chocolate, candy, or potato chip.

Eating habits may also change through the influence of advertisements. This is especially important for children because they see tens of thousands of TV advertisements per year; many of these are for foods such as sugar-sweetened cereal, candy, sugar-sweetened beverages, and fast food. Additionally, more and more children now see food advertisements through the Internet. As a result, children are likely to request high-fat, high-calorie foods that are heavily advertised.

The type of food one prefers depends upon its taste and eating habits. Taste preferences develop early in life and remain relatively stable through young adulthood.

As taste preferences are acquired through learning processes including repeated exposure to various foods, and exposure to TV viewing early in life and they have a marking lifelong influence in eating practices.

Advertisements had (and still have) large impact on the minds and lifestyle of children exposed to such media. Currently this is a serious and growing concern for public health officials, registered dietitians, and families.

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When a child is watching his favorite show, he comes across a vast amount of advertisement, promoting unhealthy food. The food industry points to parents who refuse to set limits for their ing popular cartoon characters and toy giveaways to increase the pester-power of youth. Billboards, in-school advertisements. Robinson T.N. *et al.* (2007) ^[19]; Dixon, H.G.*et al.* (2007) ^[18].

TV viewing is significantly associated with increased consumption of unhealthy foods, including fast food. Chamberlain J.*et al.* (2006) ^[14]. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) committee conducted a systematic review of the scientific evidence and concluded that TV advertising influences the food preferences, purchase requests and diets, at least of children under age 12 years. Institute of Medicine (2006) ^[18].

Children are easily swayed to choose the foods they see as advertisements. Some of the foods shown in commercials don't do them any favors when it comes to feeding their growing brains and bodies. Many are high in solid fats, added sugars, sodium and/or calories and they often lack vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber.

Food and beverage marketing is a major factor that influences children's food preferences and purchasing requests. Marketers use many avenues to reach children with their messages such as us.

Review of Literature

Due to the continual variety of Children's programs and viewing television while eating they are exposed to on a daily basis the response of poor behavior and unhealthy lifestyle habits that ultimately leads to an increase in the health risks of this population.

Although there is a substantial scientific evidence demonstrating the link between duration of TV viewing and children adiposity as well as TV viewing behaviour and future adiposity, and association between exposure to TV advertisements and obesity.

Vereecken CA, Todd J, Roberts C, Mulvihill C, Maes L. (2006) ^[23].

Studies have also found a link between fast food restaurant advertising and body mass index, reduce the number of overweight 3 to 11 year old children by 18%. Chou SY, Rashad I, Grossman M. (2008) ^[6].

Simulation studies have been conducted in order to assess the effect of advertising on obesity. M According to these studies, in the absence of TV advertising for food, the rate of overweight and obesity for 6 to 12 year old children would have been reduced by about 25% and 40%, respectively. Significant associations have been found between fast food advertising and child body mass index. (Chrisa A., Meg Bruening., *et al.* 2013) ^[5].

Unhealthy snacking while watching television is common (Carruth, Goldberg, & Skinner, 1991) ^[3] and viewing food advertising causes greater snack food consumption. (Halford, Boyland, Hughes, Oliveira & Dovey, 2007) ^[15].

It was found that television viewing experience is associated with the endorsement of the messages presented in children's food advertising. It means that the unhealthy food that are advertised tastes great.

(Harris, Bargh & Brownell, 2008) ^[13]. TV viewing offers a surplus of time for food consumption, and a few studies have found that high levels of TV viewing were associated with reduced nutritional quality in the diet of school-aged children (Hearens, L. *et al.* 2007).

(Coon *et al.* 2001) ^[7] found that a large proportion of the foods eaten during TV viewing were of low nutritional value, and (Blass *et al.*) that TV viewing during meals increased energy intake. Finally, Husby *et al.* ^[20] observed, in a qualitative study, that children with less healthy eating habits ate meals and snacks alone, often in front of the TV, more often than children with healthier eating habits.

Brian Wansink, PhD, Professor, and Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab, and author of *Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life*. "It really depends on the type of show. Action and adventure, or anything exciting and distracting, has a tremendous influence. If there's any food sitting in front of you, it might be gone in seconds." His research reveals that viewers are 98 percent more likely to snack while watching an action movie, and consume 28 to 55 percent more popcorn while watching a tearjerker.

Health authorities in the USA believe that the prevalence of advertising for unhealthy food on children's television is a leading cause of children's increasingly unhealthy diet (Brownell & Horgen, 2004; Institute of Medicine (IOM), 2006) ^[18].

Zimmerman and Christakis in their research *Children's Television Viewing and Cognitive Outcomes* they mention that toddlers at the age of 3 watched TV at an average of 2.2 hours daily. While from ages 3 to 5 years the average increases to 3.3 hours daily. (Zimmerman & Christakis, 2005) Children learn much about their social world vicariously, through observation of the media (Bandura, 2002) ^[2]. When watching television, children learn that calorie-dense foods that are high in fat and sugar taste great and are extremely rewarding to consume. (Horgen, Choate, and Brownell, 2001) ^[16]. Food products comprise the most highly advertised category on television networks that children watch most; and 98% of advertised foods are of low nutritional value (Powell, Szczpka, Chaloupka, & Braunschweig, 2007) ^[20].

Lack of parental control and monitoring children's media exposure, children are then at a higher risk of being influenced. Children heavily influenced by the media have the ability to manipulate how money is spent and savvy companies see them as the consumers to be targeted (Peregrin, 2001, p. 56).

Dietary habits form over a lifetime and are greatly influenced by the social environment and family settings as well as what children watch on television (Schneider, 2006).

Television viewing during childhood and adolescence was related to a more unhealthy diet in early adulthood (Jennifer L. Harris and John A. Bargh, 2008) ^[14].

Long time spent on TV viewing, and possibly to a lesser degree, frequent consumption of meals during TV viewing, seem to be associated with generally having unhealthy food preferences and food habits among school-aged children. These associations, however, were not generally persistent after 6 years of follow-up. (Hare-Bruun H, *et al.* 2011) ^[12].

The most common themes in food advertising targeting children are great taste, fun, happiness and being "cool" (Folta, Goldberg, Economos, Bell & Meltzer, 2006) ^[9]. Unhealthy food references also appear extensively during television programming (Story & Faulkner, 1990) ^[22].

Children sometimes even spend their own money on the products they see repeatedly reinforced around them. Advertisers use this well known fact to target children because they know the powerful influence children can have on their parents purchasing decisions (Peregrin, 2001, p. 56) Food and beverage marketing is a major factor that influences children's food preferences and purchasing requests.

Marketers use many avenues to reach children with their messages such as using popular cartoon characters and toy giveaways to increase the pester-power of youth. Billboards, in-school advertisements, Robinson TN, Borzekowski DL, Matheson DM, Kraemer HC. (2007) ^[19] Dixon HG, Scully ML, Wakefield MA, White VM, Crawford DA (2007) ^[8].

Conclusion

Media is one of the major causes of the abnormal and unhealthy eating habits of a child as children demand the food that they see in advertisements and it is very hard for them to differentiate between what is good to them and what is bad as a result of developing this bad habit of watching TV while eating. His brain has not yet developed as media lures them by making the advertisements more appealing without keeping in mind the harm it can cause to them. Therefore it is very difficult to change the mind of the child as it is presented in a package and mindset of happiness tool.

All the demands of the children are influenced by advertising be it be a toy or snack food. Due to advertising demands arise in the minds of the children, and gradually these demands become the cause of children and parent conflict. The influence and exposure to TV advertisements and dietary choices of children put them at greater risk of overweight and obesity and poorer nutritional status. Efforts to use advertising targeted at children and adolescents to promote healthy foods and to replace young people's TV viewing time with alternative activities would appear to offer a way forward in the short term.

Implications

The center and state and the local government should implement policies for nutrition and set marketing standards in order to achieve uniform protection of the diets and health of children and youth.

Health care practitioners should discuss with families the habits of children with regard to T V viewing and inform them about the negative impact of food advertising on children's dietary behaviours.

Families being the important and vital unit in the life of a child lives should set rules for various activities such as TV viewing and advertising exposure as every child depends on the family for its nutritional requirements. It is important that parents be aware of the amount of advertising exposure their children receive and its impact on their food preferences. Parents should also understand the importance of refraining from watching TV during meals, removing TV from children's bedrooms, and generally limiting their children's exposure to TV.

Parental communication to about advertising and setting rules about food consumption will be successful.

Having meals as a family will help in curbing down the harms associated with effects on children across many domains of life, including the development of healthy eating behaviors and the maintenance of a healthy weight status.

Family meals will therefore have a host of benefits to health and well-being, including better grades and less drug use.

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