

Food and beverages marketing targeting children: can it be healthier?!

The problem

Children are growing up in an obesogenic environment that promotes an unhealthy diet. In the Netherlands, 1 in 7ⁱ children under the age of 13 years is overweight. Marketingⁱⁱ that targets childrenⁱⁱⁱ contributes to this obesogenic environment by stimulating the consumption of unhealthy food and beverages^{iv,v}. Research reveals that food marketing that targets children primarily involves food and beverages without any positive effect on health, such as processed products high in sugar and/or fat^{vi,vii,viii}. This is the case with 94% of the food advertising that targets children on television, equivalent to 239 TV spots per week^x. Of all product packaging with a marketing strategy that targets children, almost 90% is for a product that does not fit in a healthy diet^x.

Marketing of unhealthy food and beverages that targets children influences their knowledge of nutrition, dietary preferences, purchasing behaviour and consumption^{xi,xii}. Children who see a lot of advertising ask their parents more often to buy the advertised products^{xiii,xiv}. They also find food with popular cartoon characters on pack more attractive and tastier^{xv,xvi}. Marketing that targets children thus contributes to overweight children.

Who are we?

We have formed a broad coalition with researchers, municipalities, and social, consumer and health organisations. We are combining our forces to protect children against food and beverages marketing that does not have a positive effect on their health. This has become necessary because self-regulation by the food industry is not having the desired effect^{xvii}. Some measures have been taken by the food industry, but not enough to really protect children. The discussion has been going on for years. With our partnership, we want to support the endeavour to safeguard children from marketing communications promoting unhealthy food.

Our stance

We believe that every child has the right to grow up in a healthy environment, as stated in the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child^{xviii}. We want a healthy diet to be the norm for children, to help prevent overweight and thus the development of joint and mental health problems, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, or cancer (at a later age).

The marketing of unhealthy food and beverages that targets children is one of the major factors in the establishment of

an unhealthy diet among children. That is why we do not want any marketing of food and beverages that does not have a positive effect on the health of children. We want to make it easier for parents to make healthy choices, without their children being swayed by the marketing and sales strategies of unhealthy food conducted by the food industry that target children.

What is needed?

We want a solid package of legal measures that restrict the marketing of unhealthy food and truly protects children. The following steps need to be taken:

- **Application of nutrition criteria**
marketing that targets children may only advertise healthy food and beverages. These are products that fit into the five healthy food groups ("Schijf van Vijf") of the Netherlands Nutrition Centre.
- **The definition of advertising from article 1 of the Dutch Advertising Code^{xix} is followed in its entirety**
This specifically means that no food advertising that targets children is permitted, unless the food meets the nutrition criteria described above, via:
 - Media channels such as television, radio, cinemas, print, online (websites, viral, online chat, videos, social networks, (video/adver) games), mobile telephone (sms, games), apps, sponsorship, product placement, peer-to-peer, sales promotion, email, direct marketing, kids' clubs, films, packaging, point-of-sale material (list is not exhaustive). Specifically for television/radio there is the added restriction: no food advertising from 6am to 9pm on television and radio, unless the food conforms to the above-mentioned nutrition criteria.
 - Marketing methods like the use of children's idols, drawn and/or cartoon figures, contests, discount campaigns, competitions, games, puzzles, jokes, sweepstakes (list is not exhaustive).
- **Age limit**
An age limit of at least 13 years is essential. Food marketing that targets children under 13 years old must promote food that meets the above-mentioned nutrition criteria, only.
There are scientific indications that an age limit of 16 years or older would be better from a health perspective. We shall conduct further research into whether the age limit in the Netherlands should be raised to 16 years.

Stop Unhealthy Food Marketing to Kids Coalition

The Netherlands

What are the benefits?

- Children are exposed less to targeted food marketing communications that do not have a positive effect on their health.
- Children have a better chance of learning about a healthy diet starting from a young age.
- Children are less at risk of becoming overweight at a young age^{xx,xxi}.
- Children are less likely to develop joint and mental health problems and chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases or cancer (at a later age).
- Society will be healthier and more productive, with all the associated social, health and economic benefits.

Partners of the Coalition



* The nutrient profile model for marketing to children established by the WHO Regional Office for Europe provides a good basis for European criteria for marketing to children. It is self-evident that in the Netherlands the nutrition criteria of the five food groups (Schijf van Vijf) are used.

ⁱ Y. Schönbeck, H. Talma, P. van Dommelen, B. Bakker, S.E. Buijendijk, R.A. HiraSing, S. van Buuren. Increase in Prevalence of Overweight in Dutch Children and Adolescents: A Comparison of Nationwide Growth Studies in 1980, 1997 and 2009. PLoS ONE 2011; 6(11): e27608. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0027608

ⁱⁱ TV spots, packaging, contests, discount campaigns, sponsoring, product placement, internet banners, advergames, billboards at sport clubs, etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ Marketing to children concerns the promotion of products clearly targeted at children/the children's market, with the aim of generating transactions that realise the reciprocal goals of consumers and producers (VWA, Kidsmarketing, 2006)

^{iv} Wherever in this position paper the term "unhealthy foods" is used, we mean food and beverages that do not have a positive effect on children's health. They include, for example, high-energy products with lots of sugar and fat

^v B.A. Swinburn, G. Sacks, K.D. Hall KD. The global obesity pandemic: shaped by global drivers and local environments. Lancet 2011;378: 804-814

^{vi} European Heart Network, The marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe. A report of Phase 1 of the 'Children, obesity and associated avoidable chronic diseases' project, 2005

^{vii} J.M. McGinnis, J. Appleton Gootman, V.I. Kraak. Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? Institute of Medicine. 2006

^{viii} Foodwatch (H.A. de Vries). Kindermarketing: onverantwoord en ongereguleerd: over de noodzaak van een gezond aanbod. 2013

^{ix} Consumentenbond (P. Oerlemans). Monitoring voedingsreclame kinderen. 2011. In opdracht van het Ministerie van VWS

^x P. van Assema, S. Joosten, K. Bessems, L. Raaijmakers, N. de Vries, S. Kremers. De omvang en aard van verkoopstrategieën gericht op kinderen bij voedingsmiddelen. TSG : Tijdschrift voor gezondheidswetenschappen ; 2011; 82 (2):108-113

^{xi} G. Cairns, K. Angus, G. Hastings, M. Caraher. Systematic reviews of the evidence on the nature, extent and effects of food marketing to children. A retrospective summary. Appetite 2013;62:209-215

^{xii} M. Buijzen, J. Schuurman, E. Bomhof. Associations between children's television advertising exposure and their food consumption patterns: A household diary-survey study. Appetite 2008; 50:231-239

^{xiii} Valkenburg PM. Beeldschermkinderen: theorieën over kind en media. 2008

^{xiv} M. Buijzen, J. Schuurman, E. Bomhof. Associations between children's television advertising exposure and their food consumption patterns: A household diary-survey study. Appetite 2008; 50:231-239

^{xv} Hastings G, Stead M, McDermott L, et al. Review of research on the effects of food promotion to children. FSA. 2003

^{xvi} Buijzen M., Rozendaal E. De jonge consument. 2012

^{xvii} The Advertising Code for Foodstuffs (Reclamecode Voor Voedingsmiddelen, RVV) concerns a "special advertising code" and forms part of the Dutch Advertising Code (NRC). Version of December 2014

^{xviii} United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989

^{xix} The Dutch Advertising Code (Nederlandse Reclame Code, NRC). Viewed on 20 May 2014. "Article 1: Advertising is defined as: any form of public and/or systematic direct or indirect commendation of goods, services and/or ideas by an advertiser or, either wholly or partly, on behalf of him, with or without the help of a third party. The solicitation of services is also defined as advertising. Explanation of Article 1: The different forms of advertising include e.g.: teleshopping, telemarketing, sponsorship, product placement, packaging, labelling, direct marketing and buzz marketing...". The RVV has exceptions to the NRC concerning the definition of advertisement (Article 1)

^{xx} J.L. Veerman, E.F. Van Beeck, J.J. Barendregt, J.P. Mackenbach. By how much would limiting TV food advertising reduce childhood obesity? European Journal of Public Health Augustus 2009. Nr. 4, p. 365-369

^{xxi} A.H. Kristensen, T.J. Flottesch, M.V. Maclosek et al. Reducing childhood obesity through U.S. federal policy. Am J Prev Med 2014; 47:604-612