

# FOOD MARKETING & CHILDHOOD OBESITY



## A Growing Problem

- One-third of American children and youth are either obese or at risk of becoming obese.<sup>1</sup>
- In the past 30 years, the obesity rate among children ages 2-5 has nearly tripled to 14%, quadrupled for children ages 6-11 to 19%, and tripled for youth ages 12-19 to 17%.<sup>2</sup>
- Obesity is linked to increased risk for Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer, and hypertension.<sup>3</sup>
- Due to increasing obesity rates, this generation of children may be the first in 200 years with a shorter life expectancy than their parents.<sup>4</sup>

"When it comes to targeting *kid consumers* we at General Mills follow the Proctor and Gamble model of **'cradle to grave'**... We believe in getting them early and having them for life."  
Wayne Chilicki, General Mills

## Food Marketing Works



- In 2006, based on a comprehensive review of the research, the Institute of Medicine issued a report finding strong evidence that television advertising influences children's food preferences, purchase requests, and diets. Among its recommendations: Stop using licensed characters to promote junk food.<sup>5</sup>
- Children consume about 167 extra calories for every hour of TV that they watch.<sup>6</sup> A preschooler's risk for obesity increases by 6% for every hour of TV watched per day.<sup>7</sup>
- One thirty-second commercial can influence the brand preferences of children as young as two.<sup>8</sup>
- In a 2007 study, preschool children reported that food in McDonald's wrappers tasted better than food in plain wrappers, suggesting that branding can even trump sensory input.<sup>9</sup>



## It's Everywhere

- Food and beverage advertisers are spending between \$10 and \$15 billion annually marketing to children.<sup>10</sup>
- About 98% of all televised food ads seen by children are for foods high in sugar, fat, or sodium.<sup>11</sup>
- Eight out of ten food companies that advertise on television also do advertising to children on the web<sup>12</sup> in virtual worlds such as Whyville, and Nicktropolis,<sup>13</sup> and through advergames<sup>14</sup> such as Pringles "Snack Attack."



- In 2006, more than 80 different media programs were used to promote food to children through brand licensing or toy giveaways. That same year fast food restaurants sold more than 1.2 billion kids meals with toys.<sup>15</sup>
- Coca-Cola paid \$20 million for product placement in *American Idol*, which is frequently among the top rated TV shows for children 2-11.<sup>16</sup>
- Burger King has branded games specifically designed for cell phones. In "BK City" players navigate through a Burger King restaurant, interact with the King, and encounter flying Whopper sandwiches.<sup>17</sup>

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- Junk food continues to be marketed in schools through vending machines, team sponsorships, incentive programs, fundraising, direct advertising, and sponsored educational materials.<sup>18</sup>

## Mixed Messages

- In-school junk food advertising masquerades as education. Ronald McDonald visits schools to promote literacy, character education, and fitness. McDonald's, Coke and Pepsi all have in-school fitness programs.<sup>19</sup>
- Characters appearing on high-sugar and high-calorie foods also appear on healthier foods, sending mixed messages to children. *Dora the Explorer* appears as a chocolate lollipop<sup>20</sup> and on packaging for fruits and vegetables.<sup>21</sup>
- Food and beverage companies are positioning themselves as partners in the fight against childhood obesity, yet corporations such as Coca Cola and Pepsico have consistently lobbied against state and local legislation to curb the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages in schools.<sup>22</sup>
- In 2007, CCFC launched a campaign to "fire Shrek" from his role as a spokes-character for the Department of Health and Human Services, because at the same time, the film *Shrek III* was promoting M&M's, Snickers, Skittles, McDonald's Happy Meals, Keebler E.L. Fudge Double Stuffed cookies, and more.<sup>23</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (2006). Report Brief: Progress in preventing childhood obesity: How do we measure up? Retrieved June 17, 2008 from [http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/36/984/11722\\_reportbrief.pdf](http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/36/984/11722_reportbrief.pdf), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Olshansky, S. J., Passaro, D. J., Hershov, R. C., et al. (2005). A potential decline in life expectancy in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 352(11), 1138-1145.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. (2006). *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?*, Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press. p. 2

<sup>6</sup> Wiecha, J., Peterson, K., Ludwig, D., et al. (2006). When children eat what they watch: impact of television viewing on dietary intake in youth. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine* 160(4), 436-42.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, T.N., et al. (2001). Effects of reducing television viewing on children's requests for toys. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 229(3).

<sup>8</sup> Borzekowski, D., et al., (2001). The 30-Second Effect: An Experiment Revealing the Impact of Television Commercials on Food Preferences of Preschoolers, *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 42, 42-46

<sup>9</sup> Robinson, T. N., Brozekowski, D. L. G., Matheson, D. M., & Kraemer, H. C. (2007). Effects of fast food branding on young children's taste preferences. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 161(8), 792-797. Retrieved June 24, 2008 from [www.archpediatrics.com](http://www.archpediatrics.com)

<sup>10</sup> Eggerton, J. (2007). Food-Marketing Debate Heats Up; Congress to join FCC and FTC in pressing for action. *Broadcasting & Cable*, May 21. Available from <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/CA6444875.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Powell, L. M., Szczypka, G., Chaloupka, F. J., & Braunschweig, C. L. (2007). Nutritional content of television food advertisements seen by children and adolescents in the United States. [Electronic version] *Pediatrics*, 120(3), 576-583, 581.

<sup>12</sup> Moore, E. S. (2006). *It's child's play: Advergaming and the online marketing of food to children*. A Kaiser Family Foundation Report. Available at <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/7536.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Chester, J. & Montgomery, K. (2007). Interactive food & beverage marketing: Targeting children and youth in the digital age. A report from Berkeley Media Studies Group. p. 52-57, 65.

<sup>14</sup> Moore, E. S. (2006). p 27.

<sup>15</sup> Federal Trade Commission (2006). *Marketing Food To Children and Adolescents: A Review of Industry Expenditures, Activities, and Self-Regulation: A Federal Trade Commission Report To Congress*. Retrieved August 4, 2008 from <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2008/07/P064504foodmktngreport.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Foust, D., & Brian G. (2004). Coke: Wooing the TiVo Generation. *Business Week* March 1, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Chester, J. & Montgomery, K. (2008a, July). Interactive food & beverage marketing: Targeting children and youth in the digital age: An update. A report from Berkeley Media Studies Group.

<sup>18</sup> Molnar, A., Garcia, D. R., Boninger, F., & Merrill, B. (2006). *A national survey of the types and extent of the marketing of foods of minimal nutritional value in schools: Executive summary*. Commercialism in Education Research Unit at Arizona State University.

<sup>19</sup> Linn, S. & Novosat, C. (2007). Calories for sale: Food marketing to children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 615, 133-155.

<sup>20</sup> Katie's Candy World (2008). *Chocolate Dora Lollipops*. Retrieved July 15, 2008, from [http://katiecandyworld.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?cPath=24\\_65&products\\_id=31](http://katiecandyworld.com/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=24_65&products_id=31).

<sup>21</sup> General Mills (2007). *Green Giant launches initiative to add fun to childhood nutrition*. Retrieved July 15, 2008, from <http://customepk.com/mightygiant/>

<sup>22</sup> Simon, M. (2006). *Appetite for Profit: How the food industry undermines our health and how to fight back*. New York: Avalon.

<sup>23</sup> CCFC Press Release (2007, April 26) CCFC to Health and Human Service: Fire Shrek. Conflict of interest between marketing junk food and promoting public health. Available at <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/pressreleases/fireshrek.htm>