

# Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



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## Food Ads Aimed at Children Changing

Children's food choices are affected by many factors, but food marketing plays a key role. The food and beverage industry in the US views children and adolescents as a major marketing force because of their spending power, their purchasing influence and their future as adult consumers.

A report from the Institute of Medicine states that food advertising aimed at children is "at worst, a direct threat to the health of the next generation." Too often, food marketing encourages children to eat a product of poor-nutritional quality. If we lived in an ideal world, companies would market to children only the most healthful foods, such as whole grains, vegetables, fruits and low-fat dairy products.

A step in the right direction is that a few major food companies are setting some basic nutrition standards for the foods they advertise to children. For

example, in 2005, Kraft recognized that foods of poor nutritional quality should not be advertised to 6 to 11 year olds. Their standards are based on levels of calories, saturated and trans fat and added sugars. That was a start, but sodium standards and advertising to kids ages 12-17 also needed to be addressed.

The Kellogg Company is in the process of adopting nutrition standards for the foods it advertises to young children. The foods the advertise on television, radio, in print, on websites or in other media with an audience of at least 50% children under age 12 will have to meet its "nutrient criteria."

Kellogg's nutrition standards limit one serving of food to no more than 200 calories, 2 grams saturated fat, 0 grams trans fat, 230 milligrams sodium (except 460 mg for Eggo frozen waffles), and 12 grams sugar (excluding natural sugars). Products that don't meet the criteria will either be

reformulated to meet nutrient criteria, or they will no longer be marketed to children under the age of 12 by the end of 2008.

Kellogg will continue its practice of not advertising to children under 6 years old. Kids will no longer see licensed media characters like Shrek on Kellogg's foods labels or in ads unless the foods meet the nutrient criteria. Kellogg will also end in-school advertising to children under 12. Parents will find it a little easier to guide children toward healthier cereal, cookies and other snack foods.

If other companies adopt similar or policies, consumers may eventually see marketing of only the most healthful foods to our youngsters.

References (accessed 7/25/07): 1. Story, M., 2004, Food Advertising and Marketing Directed at Children and Adolescents in the US, *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 2. Jacobson, M., 2007 Kellogg Curbs Ads to Kids, *Nutrition Action Health Letter* 3. [www.cspinet.org](http://www.cspinet.org) 4. Wootan, M. 2005 Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children, CSPI and Its Nutrition Policy Project, [www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy](http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy)

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.

The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet.

To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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