

Reviewing the code of advertising standards and practice

Response from the National Heart Forum

26 March, 2002

The National Heart Forum (NHF) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the standards and codes of practice which govern television advertising. As an alliance of over 40 national organisations with an interest in the prevention of avoidable coronary heart disease, the NHF is concerned about the factors which may influence children's eating habits towards an unbalanced diet, including food advertising on television. Poor nutrition in early life has an important impact on children's immediate and long-term health.

Children's diet and health

The government's National Diet and Nutrition Survey (2000) confirms the poor state of children's diets. British children eat less than half the recommended portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and the vast majority have intakes of saturated fat, sugar and salt which exceed the maximum adult recommendations. Many young people depend for a significant proportion of their total intake of energy on three foods - chips, cakes and biscuits - at the expense of more nutritious options.

Food advertising

The majority of foods and drinks advertised during children's and young people's television programmes constitute these sugar, fat and salt-dense products. Most children and many young people do not purchase the food they consume, implying that advertising to this group is for the purpose of garnering 'pester power'.

Advertising Standards Code

The NHF is pleased to note that the current code acknowledges that "*advertising should not undermine progress towards national dietary improvement by misleading or confusing consumers or by setting bad examples, particularly to children.*" [8.3]

Yet there is a very high volume of advertising for foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar targeted at children. As long as regulations apply only to individual advertisements and do not take account of the cumulative effect of these advertisements, advertising practice as a whole will fail to protect or promote children's health. **The NHF would encourage the ITC to explore ways in which the cumulative effect of advertising during children's television programming might be monitored and controlled.**

Section 9: Community Standards

The NHF welcomes the inclusion of community standards as a means of guarding against harm and offence. **The NHF would like to suggest that the ITC, in determining "generally accepted moral, social or cultural standards", should fully explore and take account of public and particularly, parental concerns about the appropriateness of targeting food advertising to young children.**

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