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## A Glance of Children Health Related Food Advertisements on Channel 2 and News Network of Iran

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**Abstract:** Many children get home work from school and spend their considerable time in front of the TV screens. The pattern of food advertisements viewed by the TV's is essential. Socio-cultural factors have an important role in food choices. Nutritional status of children is even very effective for a healthy life in adolescent. Studies show that people choices for both valuable or junk foods and drinks are affected by advertisement that they view. We aimed to assess the food advertising mode on Channel 2 and News Network of Iran Broadcasting. The advertised subjects have been evaluated in January and February 2010 for 20 days (10 days for every channel including 4 weekends and 6 working days). 78% of the food advertising time on channel 2 was for junk and unhealthy foods and the proportions for News Network was 72%. More than 85% of food advertising broadcast on channel 2 for kids attributed to unhealthy food. The study has shown that most of the TV nutritional advertisements were targeted for junk snacks and food with low value nutrients including high in fat, sugars, salt and other additives. The education of the population with respect of food choices and availability of wide selection of safe foods and avoidance of junk foods should be a strategy for health concerning policy makers. National law and regulations also must be enacted for legal prohibition of advertising junk and poor nutrient foods.

**Key words:** Health children, advertising, food

### INTRODUCTION

Improving the nutritional status, education of the population related to consumption and drinking habits, achieving acceptable quality and quantities of foods, avoidance of junk foods are important policies in the world. Nutrition patterns appear to play an important role in promoting positive dietary intake. Both overweight and poor nutrition are becoming issues of increasing concern for public health (Crooks, 2003). One of the UNICEF's challenges in the world perceives how nutrition can affect the health of children. Health, education, equality and supporting of children and adolescences are its main targets (Francoise, 2006). Nutritional status of children is even very effective for a healthy life in adolescent (Hatami, 2001; Kelishadi, 2004). Federation of Asian Nutrition Societies strategies are for the purpose of achieving and acceptable level of quantity, quality and safe food as nutrition Goals for Asia-vision (Nutritional Goals for Asia-vision, 2003). Children require high caloric intake and plenty of protein and minerals because of their growth and excessive activities. Some snacks, like sweets, chocolate puffs and chips are responsible for loss of appetite and avoiding taking the main foods (Baghernia, 2003). In different populations however, the family affects the food choices significantly, but because of the complexity of society in many countries a large part of eating is done outside the family environment. Many children after

coming back from school spend their time in front of TV, computer and video game screens. It is now normative for many children aged 2-18 years in the world to have a television set in their own room (Roberts *et al.*, 1999). It is estimated that the average child sees more than 40,000 television advertisement each year, most of which are 15-30 sec in length (Kunkel, 2001). Kids younger than 8 spend an average of 2.5 and kids 8 and up spend 4.5 h watching TV or playing video games (Sandra, 2005). High television and computer use among children is associated with more unhealthy dietary behaviors (Utter *et al.*, 2003). Most of the TV nutritional advertising targeted at children for junk snacks and foods with low value nutrient including high in fat, sugars or salt (POSTNOTE, 2003; Dehdari *et al.*, 2004). Approximately 80% of all advertising targeted to children falls within four product categories: toys, cereals, candies and fast-food restaurants (Kunkel and Gantz, 1992). Studies on advertisements on 5- to 8-year-old children at a 2-week long camp showed that children choices for either valuable or junk food and drinks are affected by advertisement that they view (Gorn and Goldberg, 1982). The effect of advertising on children's eating habits is the area that expert authors are interested to study. Such advertisements are effective in persuading children to like and request the product (Borzekowski and Robinson, 2001). This study is aimed to examine Channel 2 and News network of Iran

Broadcasting advertising mode. As the media have an important role for health matters education (Khamsi, 1996) we evaluated the advertising health related subjects which may affects viewer well being.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

We examined the advertising mode of News Network and Channel 2 television of Iran. The advertised subjects evaluated in January and February 2010 for 20 days. 10 days for News Network and 10 days for channel 2. 10 days for every channel including 4 weekends and 6 working days. On the whole we had 144 h television viewing (72 h for every channel). Advertising time was calculated by a wristwatch based on seconds. Then we computed the advertising proportions of healthy and unhealthy foods.

### RESULTS

From 72 h programs on channel 2, one hour, 44 min and 20 sec attributed to advertising while the proportion of News Channel was one hour, 21 min and 15 sec. Food advertising time in channel 2 was 54 min and for News Network was 46.5 min. In channel 2, 42 min (78%) were for junk and unhealthy foods and about 12 min (22%) for healthy foods. The proportion for News Network was 33.5 and 13 min (72%, 28%) respectively (Table 1). From 5 min and 12 sec advertising broadcast for kids before, after and during their programs in channel 2, about four minutes attributed to food advertising. The proportion of unhealthy foods was 3 min and 24 sec (85%) and healthy foods were 35 sec (15%).

### DISCUSSION

The education of the population with respect to food choices and availability of wide selection of safe foods and avoidance of junk foods is a worldwide policy. As the media has an important role for health matters education (Khamsi, 1996) and many people returning home from work place spent their considerable time in front of TV screen, the pattern of food advertisements viewed by TV's is essential. This study shows that more than 70% of food advertising in two channels attributed to junk and low value nutrients including high in fat,

additives and sugar or salt foods. In different populations however, the family affects the food choices significantly, but a large part of eating is done outside the family environment. Therefore, food choices by both individuals and suppliers may be affected by television advertising. Policy makers concerned to public health should consider the role of advertising. The primary purpose of all television advertising is to influence the attitudes and subsequent behavior of viewers (Roberts, 1982). Adults may recognize the difference between commercial advertising and their own interest and needs, but children are unable to distinguish. High television use among children cause exposure to more than 40,000 television advertisements (Kunkel, 2001) and is estimated to spend 2-5 h daily in front of screens (Sandra, 2005). So, the pattern of advertising is essential. The studies showed a significant association between TV viewing and unhealthier dietary behaviors and obesity (Utter *et al.*, 2003; Dorosty and Hodjat, 2004). An increasing in the prevalence of childhood obesity has been reported to the emergence of the advertising of unhealthy foods (Horgen *et al.*, 2001). This study shows that 85% of children's program advertisement time is attributed to unhealthy food. Some snacks, like sweets, chocolate puffs and chips are responsible for loss of appetite and avoidance of taking the main foods (Baghernia, 2003), while children require high caloric intake and plenty of protein and minerals because of their growth and excessive activities. So junk food advertising is directly associated to health and well being and the development of children. As the studies show that children choices for either valuable or junk food and drinks are affected by advertising they were viewed (Gorn and Goldberg, 1982). Cross-cultural research comparing families has demonstrated a positive relationship between children's amount of television viewing and their product-purchase requests (Robertson *et al.*, 1989) and also the parent-child conflict purchase for requests triggered by television advertising (Robertson, 1979). Advertising of most junk foods make children misimpression that is full meals, while they are foods with little nutritional value (Palmer and McDowell, 1981). This caused, children deprivation of valuable and

Table 1: The comparison of advertising times for unhealthy and healthy foods in channel 2 and news network

News network				Network 2 (Channel 2)			
Unhealthy foods	Advertising time (min)	Healthy foods	Advertising time (min)	Unhealthy foods	Advertising time (min)	Healthy foods	Advertising time (min)
Puffs	3.6	Dairy products	5.5	Puffs	7.5	Dairy products	3.6
Chips	7.0	Eggs	0.5	Chips	6.4	Eggs	1.3
Drinks	1.0	Herbal extracts	1.6	Drinks	1.2	Herbal extracts	1.5
Candies	10.7	Food supplements	1.6	Candies	12.5	Food supplements	1.6
Conserved foods	5.0	Mixed useful foods	3.7	Conserved foods	4.0	Mixed useful foods	4.0
Sausages and salami	1.0		-	Sausages and salami	1.0		-
Squeezed plum	1.2		-	Squeezed plum	1.8		-
Mixed junk foods	4.0		-	Mixed junk foods	7.8		-
Total	33.5		12.0	Total	42.0		12.0

essential meals. Where the eating habits formed during childhood often persist throughout life (Jacobson and Maxwell, 1994) so this affects a child's present and future health and has direct impact on the quality and even the quantity of individuals' life. National law and regulations must be enacted for legal prohibition of advertising of junk and poor nutrient foods. Studies in the last decade show improvement in the quantity of foods in Iran (Azarmanesh, 2000) but it seems the real needs and quality of foods are neglected. The High Council of Health of Iran should manage the health related advertisements especially junk and unhealthy foods in different media. Just like what they have done for tobacco and alcoholic drinks. However tobacco and alcohol are two most obvious products which are advertised in the entire world (Greenblatt, 2000) and are harmful to physical and psychological development of people, in Iran advertising and drinking alcohol and advertisement of tobacco is illegal. Providing national regulations for foods will protect people especially young children from excessive or inappropriate advertising. This should be the basis for many policies involving the development of the society.

**Conclusion:** The education of the population with respect of food choices and availability of wide selection of safe foods and avoidance of junk foods should be a strategy for health concerning policy makers. National law and regulations also must be enacted for legal prohibition of advertising junk and poor nutrient foods.

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