

Stop the marketing of unhealthy food aimed at children!

Every child is entitled to grow up in a healthy environment

The problem

The food environment and the marketing of food products play a crucial role in the purchase and consumption of food. Most marketing that targets children promotes unhealthy food.^{1,2} Unhealthy eating habits can lead to a lack of variety in the diet, deficiencies in essential nutrients and in many cases to obesity and serious health issues. Another concern is that obese children are often bullied, find it difficult to connect socially with their peers and are more likely to have psychosocial problems. Generally speaking, children who become obese never manage to lose that weight.³ In the Netherlands, more than one in eight children and teenagers up to the age of 17 years are overweight. This figure rises to one in two in adulthood.⁴ After smoking, unhealthy nutrition is the most significant avoidable cause of death and the loss of healthy years of life among adults in the Netherlands.

Unhealthy nutrition is responsible for 6 billion euro being spent on healthcare and disease.⁵

The current approach is not offering children adequate protection

Despite WHO recommendations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and commitments from the Dutch government promising that they will tackle marketing of unhealthy food products to children, in the Netherlands children are still being exposed to marketing that promotes unhealthy food.⁶ The current system of self-regulation on the part of the food industry has to change and be improved in terms of protecting children and giving them the opportunity to grow up in a healthy environment when it comes to food.

Findings of the tracking study on marketing to children⁶

Children are often exposed to advertisements for unhealthy food.

- 71% of the food adverts on television do not comply with the regulations in force now.
- Exposure to marketing via online media is not transparent.
- There is still a lot of exposure at outdoor venues, like recreation and sporting events, thanks to ambiguous definitions.

Parents want to see an end to marketing of unhealthy food products that targets children

Target audience research (Netherlands Nutrition Centre 2018)⁷ shows that:

- 63% of parents believe that measures ought to be taken against the marketing to children of unhealthy food products.
- 75% of parents want to see a curbing of the marketing of unhealthy food products targeting children at schools, on social media and during sporting events for children.
- Almost nine out of ten believe that marketing focusing on children at sporting events, schools, in television series, films and games influences their child's preferences and the food they go for.

1 'A future for the world's children', Lancet, WHO, and Unicef (2020)

2 Building Momentum: lessons on implementing robust restrictions of food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing to children, World Cancer Research Fund International, 2020

3 <https://www.nji.nl/Overgewicht-Probleemschets-Gevolgen>, retrieved on 17 April 2020

4 www.volksgezondheidszorg.info/onderwerp/overgewicht/cijfers-context/huidige-situatie#node-overgewicht-kinderen

5 'Volksgezondheid Toekomst Verkenning 2018 'Een gezond vooruitzicht', [Future Outlook on Public Health], National Institute of Public Health and Environmental Protection, 2018

6 Monitor Kindermarketing Voeding Meting 2018-2019 [Tracking study of Food marketing to Children], Panteia, commissioned by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2019

7 Onderzoek kindermarketing (on)gezonde producten, [Research project into the marketing of healthy and unhealthy products targeting children], Flycatcher commissioned by the Netherlands Nutrition Centre, 2018

The solution

The current self-regulatory system was not designed to be in the interests of the child. Children should be able to grow up in a society where marketing that targets them is only used to market healthy nutrition. It is time for honest, transparent and clear legal measures for the advertising of food products, advertising that puts the rights of the child first. Monitoring and enforcement is crucial in this, if the marketing of unhealthy food that children are actually exposed to is to be prevented. And this should be accompanied by penalties against those who persist in illegal marketing to children.

Legislation protecting the rights of the child includes the following elements:

1. Advertising aimed at children must only promote healthy nutrition

Advertising aimed at children must only recommend healthy food. This includes advertising that does not exclusively target children, but that they are nevertheless exposed to.

2. Lower the advertising reach threshold to 10%

In the current Advertising Code for Food Products, an advert does not target children if viewership research shows that the audience consists at most of 25% of children up to and including the age 12. We would like to see that reach threshold lowered to 10% at most for children up to and including the age of 17.

3. Prohibit all kinds of marketing aimed at children that promotes unhealthy food products

Advertising on packaging and at point of sale is permitted under the current Advertising Code. And yet attractive drawings, fonts or promotions constitute the direct commendation of products to children. We want to see

a stop to every kind of marketing to children that involves the promotion of unhealthy food products in accordance with Article 1 of the Dutch Advertising Code.¹

4. Healthy food = the Wheel of Five

In the current Advertising Code for Food Products, the healthiness of food products is assessed based on the nutritional criteria drawn up by the food industry itself, and these criteria are not in line with the Wheel of Five. Healthy food only includes products that fall within the Netherlands Nutrition Centre's Wheel of Five, which is the national, independent model for healthy eating habits.²

5. You are a child until you reach the age of 18

In the current Advertising Code, advertising (excluding all exceptions) of food products is not permitted if it targets children up to and including 12 years. This fails to take into account the 13 to 17 age group, despite the fact that, according to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Netherlands has also endorsed, all persons are children until they turn 18.

1 Definition of 'advertising' according to Article 1 of the Dutch Advertising Code: 'Any public and/or systematic direct or indirect commendation of goods, services and/or ideas by an advertiser, or wholly or partially on its behalf, regardless of whether it is with the aid of third parties.'

2 The nutritional profiles for the marketing of food to children set out by WHO Europe constitute a good basis for European criteria of marketing aimed at children. It speaks for itself that the nutritional criteria laid down in the Wheel of Five should be applied in the Netherlands.

What are the benefits?

- It would give children a better chance of learning healthy eating habits.
- It would give children a better chance of having a healthy life.
- Children would be less likely to become obese and suffer from health problems, both now and later in life.

Alliantie **Stop kindermarketing**
ongezonde voeding

