Legal definition of foods that would be included in food advertising restrictions

High Fat, Sugar and salt foods (HFSS)

The term 'junk food' is not used. Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) are disproportionately marketed and promoted to children in Australia [1-4]. Excess consumption of these HFSS foods, usually energy dense and with relatively little nutrient content, is considered detrimental to health and counter to the recommendations of the Australian Dietary Guidelines[5]. In terms of food and drink products marketed to children, the majority fall within the 'Big Five' product categories: pre-sugared breakfast cereals, soft drinks, confectionery, savoury snacks and fast food outlets[6].

The *legal definition* is based on the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) extensive nutrient profiling of foods to define a criteria for the purpose of Ofcom broadcasting restrictions to reduce the exposure of children to television advertising of foods high in fat, sugar or salt. The nutrient profiling model (NPM) was used to differentiate these foods while encouraging the promotion of healthier alternatives. The FSA NPM underwent rigorous scientific scrutiny and extensive consultation. It has strong backing from a wide range of nutritional experts including the independent Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and is supported by Public Health and Broadcasting Ministers.

The FSA's NP model uses a straightforward scoring system which recognises the contribution made by beneficial nutrients that are particularly important in children's diets (protein, fibre, fruit and vegetables, and nuts) and penalises food with components that children should eat less of (energy, saturated fats, salt and sugars).

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) – the mechanism used by Ofcom to categorise food and beverages as either HFSS or non-HFSS – is applied to rules on food and drink advertising on TV (under Ofcom and BCAP). Nutrient profiling systems can be used to identify HFSS to inform decision making processes to determine which foods can and cannot be promoted to children.

In Australia

The Australian food regulatory system has experience with nutrient profiling for implementing food standards. Building on the basis of methodology described above, Food Standards Australia and New Zealand developed a nutrient profiling system to set defined criteria to identify foods that would be considered suitable to carry nutrition and health related claims (should this process be implemented in Australia). The Nutrition calculator is available on the FSANZ website for your viewing.[7]

It should be noted that although FSANZ has the information and expertise that would be required to develop a nutrient profiling model for identifying HFSS foods to apply advertising and promotions restrictions to; it would be a discrete task.

The World Health Organisation document on marketing of food and drinks to children was first released in 2006[8] and a report outlining a set of recommendations on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children was released in 2011[9]. In this report, the evidence for unhealthy diet as a risk factor for noncommunicable disease is summarised. The array of marketing techniques includes: advertising, sponsorship, product placement, sales promotion, cross promotions using celebrities, brand mascots or characters, popular with children, web sites, packaging, labelling and point-of-purchase displays, e-mails and text messages, philanthropic activities tied to branding opportunities, and communication through "viral marketing" and by word-of-mouth. The report concludes that ***food marketing to children is now a global phenomenon and tends to be pluralistic and integrated, using multiple messages in multiple channels.***

The report encourages governments to develop and implement policy to reduce the impact on children of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. This could be done by reducing the exposure of children to, and power of , marketing HFSS foods. Standard definitions and a uniform process is recommended. FSANZ is well placed to prepare the criteria for such an exercise (with additional resources).

The marketing and promotion of HFSS food and non-alcoholic beverages to children is a global issue that can effectively be curbed at a local level with mandated regulation.

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