



NEWS RELEASE

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Cartoons, cereal, candy: food marketing to children

*By Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Many of us have fond childhood memories of sitting in front of the TV watching cartoons on Saturday mornings while enjoying our favorite cereal. I shared this tradition with my sons as children, only to realize that much of the time they spent watching their favorite cartoons included numerous advertisements for sugar-laden cereals and candy. Were they being trained to ask mom and dad to buy these foods along with developing a desire for them? This is possible, if they had not grown up with a dietitian for a mom.

As the obesity rate in children continues to rise, federal agencies and health care professionals such as myself are working to address the issue through many different avenues.

Review in 2006

A research review conducted by the Institute of Medicine found that television advertising influences children, especially those younger than 12, in what foods they like to eat and ask their parents to buy. They also found that there is an association with increased rates of obesity in children and youth. In turn, the panel recommended there be advertising for healthier foods aimed at children.

A Federal Trade Commission report, “Marketing Food to Children and Adolescents: A Review of Industry Expenditures, Activities, and Self-Regulation,” found that 44 major food and beverage marketers spent \$1.6 billion to promote their products to children under 12 and adolescents ages 12 to 17 in the United States. Based upon the research review, the report calls

for all food companies “to adopt and adhere to meaningful, nutrition-based standards for marketing their products to children under 12.”

Review in 2009

A working group was created that includes the Food and Drug Administration, FTC, Department of Agriculture, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This group has created proposed standards for food marketed to children up to age 17. Those foods cannot have more than 1 gram of saturated fat per serving; 13 grams of added sugar; 200 milligrams of sodium; or 0 trans fats, which they defined as more than half a gram, per normal serving.

The working group is scheduled to report its findings in July. It remains to be seen what foods will be included among all those being reformulated to meet the new proposed standards, yet several food manufacturers such as Kellogg’s and General Mills have already reduced the amount of sugar in some cereals. However, much more work remains to be done.

Takeaway tips for parents

Talk with your children about the advertisements they see on TV and on the Internet. Young children, depending on their age, may not realize the difference between their favorite show and a commercial for a food. When they ask for a cereal or other foods containing a lot of sugar and little or no fiber, use it as an opportunity to talk about choosing foods that will help them grow healthy and strong. Foods with little nutritional value are OK for sometimes, however children need to eat nutrient-dense foods to grow.

For older children, take them shopping and allow them to choose cereals and snacks that contain fiber, whole grains and less sugar. This gives us as parents the opportunity to teach children how to evaluate what they see on TV and online and learn to make informed decisions.

For more information about making healthy choices, visit Ask the Dietitian on <http://www.commissaries.com> and post your questions on the DeCA Dietitian Forum. Be sure to look for other useful information in the Dietitian’s Voice archive. Sign up with the DeCA Dietitian on www.twitter.com and get messages sent to your cell phone today. For delicious recipes, check out Kay’s Kitchen. And to enjoy all your commissary has to offer, sign up for the *Commissary Connection*.

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of*

commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,300 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.