"It’s got adverts... Always, always there"

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HOW DOES OBESITY IN CHILDHOOD AFFECT CANCER RISK AS AN ADULT?

It is possible overweight children may be at increased risk of cancer as adults, but the evidence isn’t clear.

1 The 2017 Youth Obesity Policy Survey: Marketing and HFSS consumption in young people

In 2017, we conducted a UK wide survey of 3,348 11-19 year olds. Participants were asked where, and how often, they see marketing for high fat salt sugar (HFSS) products, their screen time, how frequently they consume HFSS products, and whether they felt pressure to consume HFSS products. We found that:

- Young people reported they frequently consumed a range of HFSS products. Almost half (44%) agreed there was pressure on them to eat and drink unhealthily. See one extra broadcast advert per week predicts 60 extra HFSS items (18,000 calories) per year.
- Both exposure to marketing and screen time for commercial channels was consistently associated with higher consumption of HFSS products. Reduced exposure can benefit weight outcomes; young people were 70% less likely to be obese when recalling seeing junk food adverts less than once a week.

2 Still Under Pressure; But Pressing for Change

Focus groups with 11-19 year olds, conducted by ScotCen in 2019, showed that:

- Young people feel HFSS marketing, particularly digital marketing, is pervasive. By using spaces associated with younger audiences, such as social media, young people feel this marketing is targeted to them.
- Young people are concerned about the impact of HFSS marketing and are supportive of protective measures, such as time restrictions, restrictions on billboard and poster placement, and for adverts to be more truthful in their depiction of products and their health impacts.
- Other factors also influence young people’s HFSS consumption such as cost, convenience, family and age.

3 The 2019 Youth Obesity Policy Survey: What we are doing next

To help build a long term picture of HFSS consumption and marketing, we will be repeating our UK wide survey of 11-19 year olds again in 2019. We will be repeating many measures from the wave one, but will also include new questions on digital media use and engagement, social norms, and attitudes towards policy. These updated questions incorporate the findings of the focus groups. The key themes we will look at are:

- Trends over time: comparing 2017 and 2019 cross-sectional data
- Social norms around HFSS consumption
- Influence of and perceptions towards food and drink packaging and advertising
- Young people’s support for policy change which could reduce exposure to HFSS marketing

Findings will be published in early 2020.

References


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