FOOD ADVERTISING AND WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Many parents are concerned about high fat/high sugar food advertising to children and how it affects them.

**Fact 1**
Australia has one of the highest levels of TV food advertising for children.

**Fact 2**
Close to 3/4 of TV food ads during children's viewing times are for foods that are high in fats, sugars and/or salt and low in dietary fibre. There are very few ads for healthy foods during children's viewing hours.

**Fact 3**
More money is spent on advertising food than any other consumer product. Food advertisers exploit children's second hand buying power, called 'pester power' in the trade.

- 'Pester Power' is children asking (or nagging) their parents to buy certain foods.
- Techniques including animation, special effects, fantasy characters, prizes and giveaways are used to attract children's attention.

**Fact 4**
Children have limited understanding of advertising and its intent.

- Children under 5 cannot discriminate between programs and ads.
- Children under 7-8 years of age do not recognise that TV advertising tries to persuade you.
- Children often don't understand the nutritional make-up of advertised food and are more likely to believe that 'fast' foods are good for them.
- Australian children watch an average of 21/2 hours of television per day.

**Fact 5**
The Australian Broadcasting Authority only minimally regulates food advertising to children. The advertising industry is largely self regulated. The situation is quite different in some countries where food ads are banned during children's viewing time, in the interests of health.

**Food Advertising to Kids**
Why should we be concerned? Children who watch more television tend to eat more unhealthy foods and be less physically active. They tend to snack more and ask for food advertised more. Research has shown that children who watch more television are more likely to be overweight and have lower fitness. Watching TV is sedentary behaviour, which increases the risk of children becoming above their most healthy weight. Television may be more influential than family in setting children's food preferences. Food advertising has the potential to set up in children poor eating habits which affect their short term and long term health. Research has also shown that television has negative effects on violence and aggressive behaviour, academic performance, body concept and self image.
What Can You Do?

* Ask your local supermarket manager to introduce a confectionary-free aisle.

* Go shopping straight after your children have eaten so that empty little stomachs don't hold you up. Or take along some healthy nibbles such as sultanas, breakfast cereals, grapes, cherry tomatoes etc in a snap lock plastic bag or lunchbox that your child has decorated with their favourite stickers.

* Limit children's total media time (includes TV, video, computers and video games) to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming per day.

* Choose children's programs on non-commercial TV.

* Discourage television viewing for children younger than 2 years and encourage more interactive activities that will promote proper brain development, such as talking, playing, singing, and reading together.

* Select programs specifically made for children (classified 'P' or 'C').

* Keep TV sets out of children's bedrooms. If they are there already, remove them.

* Use the video recorder wisely to show or record high-quality, educational programs for children.

* Provide daily opportunities for physically active (and fun) activities. Spend time playing with children teaching them basic skills like catching and throwing.

* Monitor the shows children are viewing. Programs should be informational, educational, and non-violent.

* Intelligent viewing - discuss which TV programs children want to watch and get them only to watch those programs.

* View TV programs along with children, and talk about the programs as well as the ads and what they mean. Discuss nutrition and food to help children analyse health value of foods, the misleading aspects of ads (eg: if it shows real fruit when in fact the food is only fruit flavoured) and advertising techniques to help children understand how they are being persuaded.

* Send any complaints about programs or advertising to the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations or the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

* Write, phone or visit your local State and Federal politicians and ask them to support more healthy food ads or less high fat, high sugar food ads.
