

Ads, Ads, Ads

Each year young people are exposed to over 10,000 food ads. Unless families live in remote places, ads are impossible to avoid. Today, every form of media contains advertisements. Food ads appear on TV and radio. They appear in newspapers, magazines and comic books. They are everywhere online and in social media. Ads even appear on movie screens at the local theater.

Avoiding electronic media doesn't mean that ads can be avoided. Kids encounter ads everywhere they go. Billboards, posters and signs can be found on roadsides, on the sides of buildings, and on many vehicles. Ads promoting food products even appear in school cafeterias and gymnasiums. Some sports stadiums now carry the names of popular food companies.

Why are young people being bombarded with food ads? Companies sell products to make money. If they advertise and market their products in a way that appeals to children, they can sell more and make more money. Children and youth are consumers just like their parents. They may not have the money, but their parents do. Advertisements for many food products, beverages and restaurants are designed to capture attention and influence likely buyers and consumers.

Some food ads directed at young people are for nutritious foods, but many are for "extra" foods, foods high in solid fats, added sugars, or salt. Advertisers know how to make food products appealing to different age groups. They know how to influence the food choices kids make because that is their job. Food advertisers use persuasive techniques known to work with young people when they design an advertisement. It takes careful listening, reading, critical thinking and sometimes research to sort the facts from the hype. Smart consumers can learn to spot the techniques and figure out if they are being influenced.

Ads try to influence the way people think, what they buy, how they dress, and the food they eat. All advertisers, including food advertisers, use words in clever ways to promote their products. It is up to consumers to figure out if the ad communicates truthful and accurate information. Smart consumers are knowledgeable consumers. They know about health and nutrition and how to evaluate an ad to determine its accuracy and effectiveness.

Health claims and information in ads should always be checked against facts from credible health authorities. Don't take anyone's word for it. Always look for documented evidence. What sounds good may be just that. It sounds good. Anything can be said or written. Always check the facts, too. How accurate are they? Are they cited or passed along by word of mouth? If you are not sure, ask a teacher, parent, caretaker or health professional to help figure it out. Don't be misled by clever ads. Your health is too important to not be a smart consumer. The decision is yours. Know how to make the healthy choice.

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Persuasive Techniques in Food Advertisements

- **Testimonials or endorsements** are statements made by celebrities or professional athletes to support a product.
- **Special offers** may be included. These might include bargains, sale prices or added bonuses like free toys.
- **Health or nutrition claims** are made that tell something special about what the product might do. It might help with losing weight or feeling more energetic.
- **Health benefits** such as *high in fiber* and *low in sodium* are pointed out.
- **Popularity appeals** make people feel that they can be part of the in-crowd or on the winning side by using the product.
- **Promises** are made such as better taste or better results.
- **Proof or evidence** is provided that looks impressive when facts, numbers and statistics are used.