



Protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing

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editorial

A healthy and balanced diet should be promoted already in childhood, a crucial period for the psychophysical development of the individual. In particular, the consumption of free sugars and soft drinks in children and adolescents should not exceed the current WHO recommendations.

This trend is very difficult to counter as the preference for sweet flavours is innate and often further reinforced by pre- and post-natal exposure and aggressive marketing. Unfortunately, sugar consumption continues to grow alarmingly due in part to the easy availability of foods and drinks rich in added sugars from vending machines, supermarkets and fast-food restaurants.

Recently, the WHO (with the recommendations included in the QR Code below and in the following link: [WHO recommends stronger policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing](#)) pointed out how exposure to food marketing affects children's health, eating behaviours and beliefs about food, thus becoming a real threat to public health. Among the proposals made, it is interesting to note the need for national governments to "curb the persuasive power of food marketing" by limiting the use of cartoons and other techniques that appeal to children, such as the inclusion of toys in packaging or advertisements with songs and celebrity endorsements.

It is already evident in the literature that an excessive intake of sugar predisposes children to a number of pathological conditions that in the long term may favour the onset not only of carious disease but also obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus, liver disease, cardiovascular and dysmetabolic diseases.

As paediatric dentists, sugar-related dietary excesses are already very obvious to us since it is mainly these that drive young patients to our clinics. In our privileged position, we should therefore increasingly promote knowledge on the possible correlations between excessive sugar consumption and the onset of these diseases, drawing the attention of parents of young patients to all foods that are harmful to their growing children.

Therefore, let us welcome these new guidelines promoted by the WHO to protect children and adolescents from the harmful impact of food marketing; and may we not miss the opportunity to share and promote this important battle for future generations!

