Childhood Obesity and the Media
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Abstract

Childhood obesity is a significant public health problem in the United States. The number of children and adolescents who are overweight or obese has tripled since 1980. The impact of media and marketing practices combined with a lack of physical activity are creating and perpetuating the current obesity epidemic. More than half of all television advertisements are directed at children and promote candy, fast food, snack foods, sugar sweeteners, beverages, and sugar-sweetened breakfast cereals.

Being overweight increases the risk of developing high cholesterol, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, and orthopedic problems. Adolescent and childhood obesity dramatically increases the risk of being obese in adulthood. As obese children’s health declines, the healthcare costs associated with obesity are rising; the total cost of the effects of obesity (in both children and adults) has climbed to well over $120 billion annually.

Currently there is no legislation to govern the media or food industry to safeguard America’s children against obesity. Industries are regulated from within and only a voluntary regulation system is in place. Limits need to be put on food and beverage advertisements aimed at children. Laws must be passed that regulate how the food and beverage industry promote their products. One solution may be the addition of a box warning in the advertisement. Educating America’s children that sugars and salt can be hazardous to their health will only begin to educate and potentially reverse the trend.