



In Geoff's Words...

UK Parents Saving Kids From Themselves

Judging from BBC News, parents in the United Kingdom are much more aware of their children's deteriorating food choices than we are. Here are some headlines:

Children 'eating themselves ill', June 1, 2000. *Five-year-old girls 'weight conscious'*, Sep 7, 2000. *Childhood obesity soars in UK*, Jan 5, 2001. *TV 'encourages poor eating habits'*, Jan 7, 2001. *Children 'breakfast on junk food'*, May 21, 2001. *Junk food ads 'targeted at children'*, July 9, 2001. *Jury to vote on children's foods*, April 23, 2002.

The last one caught my eye. This "jury" will be composed of parents of kids aged between two and 16. They will examine products and selling tactics used by food manufacturers, vote, and pass on their comments to an independent watchdog agency. Some awards being considered are the "**Additive Nightmare**", for the product that most relies on artificial sweeteners, colors and flavorings for its appeal. Another award is "**Pester Power**" for the marketing technique that most encourages children to nag their parents for junk food. There are positive awards, too, like "**High Five**" for the best promotion of fruit and vegetables to children.¹

The idea that companies target children with ads promoting unhealthy food didn't bother me much because I thought kids can only eat what their parents shop for, so it doesn't matter what they see on television. The article on junk food ads made me change my mind. After monitoring commercial television programs for 40 hours, a report found nearly half of all the food advertised during children's television hours were for cakes and confectionery. There were no ads for fruits and vegetables.² The problem is this disparity causes children to think of unhealthy food as desirable and healthy

food as unimportant, and that in turn will do them a disservice both during childhood and as adults.

Perhaps the marketing damage is already apparent because the *Children 'eating themselves ill'* article states 80% of [British] children aged four to 18 regularly eat snack foods such as chips, biscuits [cookies] and chocolate. In addition, 20% ate no fruit at all during the one-week survey.³ Are fruits too unglamorous?

Dry Days at Middle School

Parents and students are sharply divided at Coronado Middle School, and the heart of the dispute is soda. The school board enacted a two-day-per-week soda sale ban at the school, and kids are griping. One student philosophized "What's the point of your youth if you can't enjoy it?"⁴ Another stated soda is needed to "keep us awake during class." Nancy McRae, a parent leader, is unsympathetic. "I believe it is unethical for the school district to generate revenues by selling products that are unhealthy for children."

As previously reported, California recently passed a state law banning soda sales at middle schools starting in 2004. We were unhappy that high schools weren't included, but this is a good start. I suggest students ignore marketing that projects the message that soda is an essential part of an "enjoyable" youth, and kids should be told that there are other tricks to use for staying awake, like getting enough sleep!

What's New

Owwie Pal is a gel-filled cold pack. Non-toxic (of course) and reusable, it has a soft backing so you don't need to wrap it in a towel. Always keep one in your freezer; they're perfect for sprains and bruises on kids and adults. \$5.95.



¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid_1945000/1945538.stm

² http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid_1429000/1429830.stm

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid_772000/772744.stm

⁴ *School no-soda days no hit*, San Diego Union Tribune, Feb 16, 2002.