

# An impact of misleading cereal advertising on children

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



We all know that sugary cereals are far from the perfect breakfast food. The companies who manufacture them know it, too. “ Sugar as Part of a Balanced Breakfast? What Cereal Advertisements Teach Children About Healthy Eating” a study published in the Journal of Health Communication, reveals that despite pledges from cereal companies to not take advantage of kids — who are easily bewitched by products they think look fun or cool — they do so anyway.

This troubling study from the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity may be enough to change the way you, and hopefully your child, look at your family’s favorite breakfast cereal and the ways in which cereal makers promote them.

#### A “ Cereal” Offense

Yale’s researchers watched and studied 158 cereal television commercials that aired between 2008 and 2009 and analyzed the nature of the messages and persuasive techniques used in each. Even though these cereal companies promised not to mislead children through the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU), an organization that attempts to enforce responsible children’s advertising, 59 percent of advertisements showcasing sugary brands portrayed an imaginative, fun cereal that brought adventure and excitement—in other words, portraying cereal as more of a toy than a part of a balanced breakfast.

This certainly isn’t the first time we’ve heard about the potentially harmful effects of advertising on our children. A 2012 study in The Journal of

Pediatrics, found that food marketing is a major factor in the skyrocketing rates of childhood obesity, which have tripled within the past 30 years. “ 98 percent of the food products advertised to children on television are high in fat, sugar, or sodium,” the study claims.

Finding a quick solution may not be so easy, however. “ Food Marketing to Youth ,” another report from the Yale Rudd Center, finds, “ On television alone the average U. S. child sees approximately 13 food commercials every day, or 4, 700 a year; and teens see more than 16 per day, or 5, 900 in a year.” Ultimately, “ The food industry spends \$1. 8 billion per year in the U. S. on marketing targeted to young people,” with many advertisements promoting products that are unhealthy.

### What Parents Can Do to Counter Misleading Advertising

With the distressing news that attempts to curb advertising companies’ deception have apparently failed in so many cases, how can parents ensure their family’s well-being?

Here are four strategies to make sure your child gets the right facts:

Point out factual flaws and misleading statements and claims you see in a commercial. Ask your children what they think the advertiser is attempting to tell them or make them believe. Do this for all advertising aimed at children — be it cereal, toys, or digital devices. That will go a long way in making them aware consumers.

Say “ NO” to children’s requests for products you know are unhealthy and explain why. Refer back to the commercial that is prompting their request. You are the parent and should be in charge of what your children eat.

Have healthy alternatives available and make them more appealing by using your imagination. For example, add fresh fruits (some are better than others) you know your child likes to a nutritional cereal; place cut fruit to make a face on a plate. Substitute cereal with a healthier option if need be.

Watch what you eat and point out the nutritional value of the foods you serve. This information will eventually sink in.