

# Junk food ads to be banned from kids' tv



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Tv watchdogs aim to ban junk food adverts during children's programmes. Ofcom will outline plans tomorrow to stop unhealthy foods being advertised on children's television. This will prevent firms from targeting children by using cartoon characters and celebrities such as Gary Lineker, David Beckham and Britney Spears. Health and consumer groups criticised the proposals, insisting they do not go far enough. It is expected Ofcom will ban advertising foods high in fat, salt and sugar from early morning - before children go to school - through until 6pm, and possibly 7. 30pm. Banned products would include takeaway burgers, chicken nuggets, fries, sugarcoated puffed oats, such as Sugar Puffs, Corn Flakes, which are relatively high in salt, crisps, cola and other sugary drinks.

Health campaigners want ads for all foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar banned until after the 9pm watershed. This could outlaw Cadbury's from continuing its sponsorship of Coronation Street. The ban would also affect McDonalds, Kellogg's, Walker's crisps, Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Cartoon characters, pop music and images of youngsters tucking into the snacks are all used in adverts.

Promotions or competitions involving computers games, pop music, theme parks and films are also used. Brands such as Kelloggs' Coco Pops have been successful pitching their adverts at children. Coco Pops are fronted by the cartoon character Coco the monkey, who sings the advertising jingle and leads children through games on the cereal's website. Ofcom has been told by the Government to draw up a regime that will control the advertising of unhealthy food. But the watchdog has previously indicated it believes there is little value in controls and supports minimum regulation.

The proposals would be based on voluntary regulation with the industry. Government ministers have threatened to force a crackdown with a change in the law if changes are not implemented. Groups such as the National Heart Forum and food and health lobbyists Sustain believe controls must go beyond children's programmes. Richard Watts of Sustain said: " The statistics show that about 70 per cent of commercials during children's viewing are for food. Of these, something like 80-100per cent are for junk. " These are the wrong messages to send children at a time when we are seeing an increase in weight problems."

Over the past 10 years, obesity among six-year-olds has doubled and trebled among 15-year-olds. And obesity diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, are now being seen for the first time in children. Jane Landon, deputy chief executive of the NHF, said: " The watershed for allowing the advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar should be 9pm. " Programmes targeted at children tend to be broadcast in the morning, at lunchtime and in the afternoon when pupils have returned home. The ban would also apply to the entire output of dedicated children's television stations including the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon.

Ofcom has described a 9pm watershed as the " nuclear option", warning it would have a disastrous effect on the income of some commercial TV channels. Another possibility would be to outlaw all food advertising - even healthy products - before a watershed. This would stop junk food manufacturers being singled out for a ban. National Consumer Council food expert Sue Dibb said: " Anything less than full restrictions on all TV ads and promotions for high fat, salt and sugar foods before the 9pm watershed will

be extremely disappointing. " The British Medical Association and backbench Labour MPs also support a total ban on junk food adverts.

Dr Vivienne Nathanson, head of science and ethics at the BMA, said: " Children and parents are surrounded by the marketing of unhealthy cereals, snacks and processed meals. This has to stop. " The Food & Drink Federation rejected the need for restrictions. A spokesman said: " Any simplistic scheme that demonises products does-n't take into account the complexity of people's lifestyles and the way they eat. " The UK boss of McDonalds, Peter Beresford, has made clear that he rejects TV advertising restrictions. He says McDonald's is not to blame for rising obesity, adding: " There is no good food or bad food, only bad diets. "