

Research: Yummy... McDonald's chicory

Research shows that young children prefer food that comes in McDonald's packaging over food that does not. This research involved children in the age bracket of three to five tasting five sets of identical kinds of food and beverages. One half was presented in McDonald's boxes, and the other half in unbranded packaging. The children ate and drank all sorts of healthy or less healthy food, such as a hamburger, fried chicken (McNuggets), fries, milk or apple juice and carrots. The parents were asked to indicate how often they ate at Maccy D's, and how much telly they watched at home.

On average, the children preferred food that they thought came from McDonald's, even though the food in the unbranded boxes was exactly the same. In 80% of situations, children chose McDonald's. Pre-schoolers who were regularly taken to the fast-food chain or lived in a house with several TVs, especially chose McDonald's.

The results of the study show that exposure to marketing/advertising influences children's preferences. Based on this study, the researchers argue in favour of regulation of – or even a ban on – advertising for high-calorie and unhealthy food products. In the US alone, annual spending on food product marketing targeting children amounts to \$10 billion. Previous research has already shown that children from the age of two can already recognize quite a few brands, and have the ability to identify the product that goes with certain brands.

Another suggestion made by the researchers in the struggle against child obesity was to use the McDonald's logo on fruit and vegetables. The thought behind that is that the pull fast-food brands have can also be used to have children eat more healthy food. It remains to be seen, however, whether McDonald's would go along with that.

Reference(s)

Khamsi, R. (2007), Fast food branding makes children prefer happy meals. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, vol.161, p.792-797. *

*: available in the EURIB library.