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**Center for Science in the Public Interest**

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**November 2003**

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**CSPI Hits Marketing Junk Food to Kids**

***Food Companies Undermine Parents, Overfeed Kids, Says Report***

Food marketing aimed at kids undermines parental authority and helps fuel the epidemic of childhood obesity, according to a report issued today by the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). The volume and variety of marketing techniques has exploded, the group says, as food marketers seek new ways of bypassing parents and directly influencing kids' food choices. Regrettably, most of the foods marketed directly to children are high in calories and low in nutrition, the group says.

"Parents are fighting a losing battle against food manufacturers and fast-food restaurants, which use aggressive and sophisticated techniques to get into children's heads and prompt them to pester their parents to purchase the company's products," said Margo G. Wootan, director of nutrition policy at CSPI and the report's author. "SpongeBob Squarepants, Winnie the Pooh, Elmo, and even sports stars like Jason Giambi are enlisted to push low-nutrition foods on kids."

The CSPI report identifies a plethora of ways that companies target kids in their homes, in their schools, on the web, and wherever else kids go. Examples highlighted in the report include:

- Campbell's "Labels for Education" program encourages families to collect labels from Campbell products that schools can redeem for equipment. It's hardly model philanthropy, says CSPI, seeing that kids' parents would have to buy some \$2,500 worth of soup, for the school to qualify for a \$59 stapler.
- Krispy Kreme "Good Grades" program offers elementary school kids one doughnut for each "A" on their report cards. CSPI points out that some states wisely prohibit or discourage using food as a reward for good behavior or academic performance.

- McDonald's Barbie has the doll dressed up as a McDonald's clerk, feeding French fries, burgers, and Sprite to kid-sister Kelly in a restaurant playset. "Unless McDonald's is paying you for ad space in the playroom, leave this toy at the store," Wootan said. Same goes, she says for other junk-food ads disguised as toys, like Play Doh's Lunchables kit, where kids are encouraged to assemble Play Doh versions of Oscar Mayer's notoriously fatty and salty lunch box items.
- The Oreo Adventure game on Kraft Foods' Nabiscoworld.com web site is one of many corporate "advergames". In this video game, children's "health" is reset to "100 percent" when kids acquire golden cookie jars on a journey to a Temple of the Golden Oreo. The Oreo Matchin' Middles shape-matching game, produced with Fisher Price, turns playtime into a chance for companies to cultivate brand loyalty and sell junk food.
- Pepsi's website profile of New York Yankees baseball star Jason Giambi, which prominently displays the quote, "I usually have several Pepsis each day—it really lifts me up," is one of many examples of a junk-food marketer linking consumption of its product with fitness.
- Cap'n Crunch Smashed Berries cereal—which, predictably, has no berries at all—encourages overeating in its magazine advertisements. Once such ad in Nickelodeon magazine reads, "Kids smashed 'em in the factory so you can fit more in your mouth."

"No amount of eye-rolling can capture how hypocritical it is for food company flacks to talk about 'moderation, balance, and exercise,'" said CSPI executive director Michael F. Jacobson. "Anyone who looks at these marketing techniques can see that they encourage excess, not moderation. Almost exclusively, they encourage consumption an unbalanced diet of high-cal and low-nutrient foods. And to link junk foods like Oreos or Pepsi to physical fitness or athletic prowess has to be one of the most cynical and unfair marketing strategies I've ever seen."

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Federal Trade Commission considered restrictions on junk-food advertising aimed at kids, but those efforts were blocked by food, toy, broadcasting, and advertising industries. CSPI says that with rates of obesity at all-time highs in children, now is the time to set standards on what foods may be marketed to kids on television and in schools. CSPI also recommends that governments sponsor media campaigns that encourage healthy eating and physical activity, and that grocers put low-nutrition foods at parents' eye level, not kids' eye level.

CSPI encourages state and local governments to fund their own nutrition media campaigns by earmarking or increasing taxes on soft drinks. More than a dozen states already have such taxes, though their revenues typically go into general funds, and are not spent promoting good nutrition or exercise.

Today, CSPI also called on Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson to make the issue of marketing junk food to kids a central focus of the administration's anti-obesity campaign.