What's Driving Childhood Obesity in The Caribbean?

Professor T. Alafia Samuels
Director, George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre
UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, Cave Hill Campus
BURDEN OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY
% Childhood Obesity (> +2SD from median BMI) by gender: from Global School Health Survey (2009-2013)
Obesity in children has dramatically increased in the last decades in Small Island States.
DRIVERS OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY
Evolution of the Problem

www.TooCoolDude.com
% Physical activity for 60 minutes/day during last 5/7 days from GSHS (2007-2013)

- Antigua & Barbuda
- Trinidad & Tobago
- Barbados
- British Virgin Islands
- Belize
- Suriname
- St. Kitts
- Dominica
- Bahamas
- Guyana
- Montserrat
- St. Lucia
- St. Vincent & Grenadines

Physical Activity (%F) Physical Activity (%M)
Myth v. Truth

• **Myth**: just exercise more and eat what you want.

• **Truth**: exercise alone generally won’t work (it takes 2 hours of brisk walking to burn off 500 calories – small chocolate and small pack of chips).
TRANSITION TO PROCESSED FOODS
Corporations Control Almost Everything You Buy — This Chart Shows How
Commercial determinants of health

- Multinational food and beverage companies promote overconsumption of **highly processed, unhealthy food and sugary drinks** for profit
- Like tobacco, **marketing is shifting** from high income countries to developing countries, including in the Caribbean


Sugar is a major contributor
Diet is a major driver. Too many kids are drinking sugary drinks.
Barbados

Intake of Major Foods by Age
*Barbados, 2010*

Source: Global dietary database
% Drank carbonated soft drinks during the past 30 days from GSHS (2009-2013)

- Suriname
- Barbados
- Jamaica
- Trinidad & Tobago
- Guyana
- Bahamas
- Belize
- British Virgin Islands
- Anguilla
- St. Kitts
- Antigua & Barbuda
- Dominica

Carbonated Soft Drink (%F)  Carbonated Soft Drink (%M)
Fruit drinks...just as much sugar as soda
Added sugar in drinks

• Calories from simple sugars added to drinks do not satisfy hunger, there is no feeling of fullness
  – *Wasted calories*

• Sugar in SSBs contain no nutrients
  – *Empty calories*

• Sugar in SSBs are absorbed extremely rapidly causing a spike in blood sugar and in insulin
  – *Dangerous calories*
HIDDEN SUGARS IN LABELS & PRODUCTS

LABELS WITH SUGAR:
Lactose; brown rice syrup; molasses; dextrose; cane sugar; corn sweetener; fructose; glucose; maltose; organic raw sugar; maltodextrin; etc..

PROCESSED FOODS WITH SUGAR:
Barbecue sauce; bacon; bread; canned meats; cereals; crackers; gravy; flavored coffee; creamers; fruit juice; ketchup; mustard; pancake mix; pretzels; salad dressing; soups; soy sauce; wine; etc. etc.
BUT WE’RE SURROUNDED BY SUGAR! IT’S EVERYWHERE! AND IT’S SO TASTY!
Born to buy: How advertising targets young consumers

Dr Emma Boyland

Biopsychology Research Group
Liverpool Obesity Research Network
University of Liverpool
ADVERTISING AVENUES
Television and film

Programme sponsorship

Product Placement
Internet advergaming
Event sponsorship
Promotional Characters

Licensed characters

Nestle Mud & Worms

Licensed characters

University of Liverpool
Premium offers/giveaways
Unhealthy food companies target children
EFFECTS OF FOOD ADVERTISING
Television and energy intake

• Television viewing has been associated with:

  • Increased meal frequency (Stroebele & Castro, 2004).
  • Fast food consumption (Taveras et al., 2006).
  • Snacking (Snoek et al., 2006; Thomson et al., 2006).
  • Increased intake of dietary fat (Epstein et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2008).
  • Lower intake of fruit and vegetables (Boynton-Jarrett et al., 2003).
Creating Brand Preference in Children
(Consumer International, 2004)

6 months: Forming mental images of corporate logos and mascots.

2 years: Children may already have beliefs about specific brands.

3 years: Already making specific requests for brand name products.
        Can identify brand names & logos especially with cartoon characters.

Lifetime: A lifetime consumer in the US is worth an estimated $100,000 to a retailer.

Children start to express self-care activities including food choice between ages of 3-8 and these are stable by 9-11 years (Kennedy, 2000).

Brand-building must therefore start in toddler-hood (Story & French, 2004).
Impact of Marketing to Children

• Nestle and others still **promoting breast milk substitutes** and depressing breast feeding rates
• Marketing **influences** childrens’ preferences, requests, consumption
• Result: 30% childrens calories from sweets, drinks, salt snacks, fast food