

## **Action Plan on Food Promotions and Children's Diets**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many children's diets are unbalanced; they contain too much fat, sugar and salt, too little starchy carbohydrate, and too few fruit and vegetables. Poor diets can lead to ill health. This paper considers one of the many influences on children's diets, the way foods are promoted to them. The Board of the Food Standards Agency has agreed a series of actions with the intention of improving the way in which food choices are promoted to children. These recommendations are addressed to all those who are in a position to influence children's behaviour and with whom the Agency would like to work to improve children's diets. The objective is to help make it easier for parents and children to make healthier food choices.

#### **The FSA Board has agreed that:**

- The evidence indicates that promotional activity influences children's eating habits.
- As the eating habits of the average family have changed over recent years with a greater emphasis on snacking, convenience foods and eating out, so it has become more difficult for children to achieve a healthy balanced diet. After a wide ranging discussion on the action needed to address this issue, including the merits of distinguishing between healthier and less healthy food, the Board concluded that parents and children needed help to reduce the proportion of children's diets which are made up of foods, snacks or meals high in fat, sugar or salt in favour of healthier options. Changing the way that foods are promoted to children is one way of helping them to achieve this.
- It is time to move from debating the issue to determining solutions - and these must involve parents, children and young people, government, regulators, schools and industry.
- This action plan highlights policy recommendations, where the Agency believes that primary responsibility lies for acting on them and how the Agency will monitor the uptake of its recommendations.

## 1. The Food Standards Agency

- **By autumn 2004** The Agency will work with DfES to agree action to improve school meals that will cover both the provision of healthy options and how best to promote uptake of these options. (This action is dependent on the results of ongoing research due to report in summer 2004.)
- **By December 2004** The Agency will develop guidelines for schools and other publicly funded premises which children visit regularly (such as leisure centres) on healthier choice vending approaches.
- **By March 2005** The Agency will publish nutritional criteria for use by food industry (including the food service sector) that are intended to reduce levels of fat, sugar and salt in foods, product ranges, and meals aimed specifically at children. The Agency will work with stakeholders to develop these criteria, and will subsequently agree targets for uptake with the food industry and publish the results of surveys monitoring progress against the targets.
- **By June 2005** The Agency will publish best practice advice on signposting of foods, meals or snacks high in salt, sugar or fat and of healthier options. This advice will be for use by the food industry (including the food service sector). Guidance will also be provided on the use of high, medium and low descriptors on nutrition labelling panels. The Agency will work with stakeholders to develop this advice, and will subsequently agree targets for uptake with the food industry and publish the results of surveys monitoring progress against the targets.
- **By June 2005** The Agency will publish best practice advice on the use of nutrition and health claims on food aimed specifically at children. The Agency will work with stakeholders to develop this advice, and will subsequently agree targets for uptake with the food industry and publish the results of surveys monitoring progress against the targets.
- **By December 2005** The Agency will revise guidelines on commercial sponsorship of educational materials.
- The Agency will press for action to address the imbalance in TV advertising of food to children, to be underpinned if necessary by Agency advice on

differentiating foods high in fat, sugar and salt and healthier options. The Agency will monitor progress towards targets to be discussed with Ofcom, and consider further in summer 2005.

## **2. Schools**

- Schools (and other publicly funded premises such as leisure centres) should ensure that vending machines are managed on the basis of a healthy vending approach which includes the promotion of healthier options
- Schools (and other publicly funded premises such as leisure centres) should not accept vending machines with branding associated with foods, meals or snacks high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Schools should provide and promote a range of healthy options at mealtimes and develop incentives to promote uptake of them in accordance with the Agency's guidelines. Local Education Authorities and Education Departments should support schools' efforts to make these changes.

## **3. Government and Ofcom (the broadcast media regulator)**

- Government departments and agencies should not endorse promotional campaigns that encourage children to consume foods, meals or snacks high in fat, sugar or salt. They should endorse campaigns for healthier options.
- Government should continue to press for the following changes to EU rules:
  - mandatory nutrition labelling on all foods to include energy, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt information (rather than sodium)
  - arrangements to prohibit use of nutrition and health claims on foods with adverse nutritional profiles
- Government should also press for the following change to EU rules:
  - an improved format for nutrition labelling, including use of high/medium/low descriptors for fat, saturated fat, non-milk extrinsic sugar and salt.
- Government and Ofcom should note the Agency's view that:
  - action to address the imbalance in TV advertising of food to children is justified

- action on advertising during children's TV slots would be likely to have some beneficial effect and that wider action might also be justified, depending on the evidence generated during Ofcom's review
  - action on the relative amounts of advertising for foods, meals or snacks high in fat, sugar or salt and for healthier foods, and the times at which these adverts are scheduled, is likely to be the most effective option to address the imbalance.
- Ofcom should also note that:
    - it should review arrangements for regulation of sponsorship of programmes

#### **4. Broadcasters**

- Public sector and commercial broadcasters should exploit programming opportunities to promote healthy eating to children
- Others should follow the example of the BBC Worldwide initiative to consider introducing nutritional criteria for use of characters from its children's programmes

#### **5. The ASA**

- The Advertising Standards Authority should carry out an early review of the arrangements for regulation of food advertising to children using print media and new media such as internet and mobile phones.

#### **6. Food manufacturers, retailers and the food service sector**

- The Agency should work with food manufacturers and retailers to develop and agree targets for uptake of best practice advice on:
  - reducing the amounts of fat, sugar and salt in foods and product ranges aimed specifically at children
  - use of front of label signposting of foods or snacks high in fat, sugar or salt and of healthier children's choices
  - use of high, medium, and low descriptors for fat, sugar and salt on foods aimed at children
  - use of nutrition and health claims on foods aimed at children which are high in fat, sugar or salt

- The Agency should work with the food service sector to develop and encourage uptake of best practice advice on:
  - reducing the amounts of fat, sugar and salt in meals aimed specifically at children
  - use of menu/notice signposting of meals high in fat, sugar or salt and of healthier children's choices
  
- Food manufacturers, retailers and the food service sector are encouraged to:
  - use promotions which encourage children to make or request repeat purchases (free gifts, token collect etc) for healthier foods
  - use new media such as mobile phones and the internet to promote healthier foods
  - use sponsorship (for example, of sporting events for children) only for brands associated with healthier foods
  - use celebrities, characters and cartoons to encourage children to eat healthier foods
  
- Food retailers are encouraged to:
  - use in-store promotional techniques, such as reduced prices, for healthier products when promoting to children
  - remove confectionery products, snacks and soft drinks from supermarket checkouts and, wherever practicable, replace them with healthier options such as fruit

## **7. Celebrities and those who license characters and cartoons**

- Celebrities and those who license characters and cartoons should use their influence to encourage children to eat healthier options rather than foods, meals or snacks high in fat, sugar or salt.

## **8. Sponsors of events and activities**

- Organisers of events such as sporting events should only accept sponsorship for brands associated with healthier foods.