

## **Proposed Nutrition Principles for Marketing Foods to Children**

I would like to voice my opinion on this and tell you that I am against this proposal. I support the motive/goal, but disagree with the means/method used to achieve the goal. The skyrocketing rate of obesity in America, and most importantly the child obesity rate, is an alarming trend that is getting more and more media attention. Public outcry is mounting, and it certainly concerns me. However, I think we must be very careful in how we go about solving the problem.

Obesity is not an issue of appearance, but health. Type II diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease, hypertension, asthma, and bone/joint problems are but some of the effects. As a result, there are a number of children taking the same medications as their parents and grandparents. In fact, this may be the very first generation where we see kids with shorter life spans than their parents. But, I am preaching to the choir – you are well aware of the epidemic, otherwise you wouldn't be proposing new guidelines for marketing food to children.

I have carefully read your proposal, and I conducted some research to better understand the situation. I believe the proposal to be a well-intended, noble effort aimed at taking the first steps toward solving this very serious threat to American health. Will it make an impact? There isn't a doubt in my mind. However, I also see it as encroaching on our basic freedoms.

It will stifle the right of free speech, limiting what can be advertised. The American Association of Advertising Agencies said, "The guidelines cover a wide range of foods, beverages and meals and, while presented as voluntary, do, in fact, seek to restrict the marketing of many popular and well known products." To the point of being voluntary – yes, the guidelines are voluntary and do not carry the weight of law, but it is very likely that companies will attempt to adhere to them because the agencies putting forth these guidelines have significant sway over marketers.

In looking at how certain products are being marketed and targeted towards children, I find myself at once outraged and disgusted. For example, The Girls Intelligence Agency gets girls as young as eight to host slumber parties as a way to test and give out products. Children, especially at that age, are highly impressionable and easily manipulated. I find that type of marketing to be reprehensible and insidious. Yet, I feel even more strongly that as a citizen of this country, I have a right to invent, develop, produce, advertise, and sell my widgets. It is because of our rights and freedoms that America is so great. But I think the bigger issue is that the marketers are not the root cause of our obesity epidemic, only a contributor.

I have seen an increasingly victim-based trend in our society. More and more people seem to be subscribing to the theory that it is their lot to accept whatever life throws their way. They would rather say, "Oh, poor me!" than do something about it. Fingers are almost always pointed outward, rather than inward; instead of accepting responsibility, the blame is hastily shifted to

someone, something, anything. Regarding obesity, about two-thirds of parents that have obese children are obese themselves. Parental awareness and involvement is absolutely crucial in combating this epidemic. So, to those that would blame fast food, advertising, or anything else, I say first look in the mirror. Are you doing *your* part?

Be a parent! Instead of pawning off the responsibility on the school system, childcare, etc., accept that you are ultimately responsible for your child's wellbeing. It isn't easy to tell your child no, they can't have Fruit Loops, or no, you aren't going to McDonalds for dinner, or no, they can't watch TV or play video games for four hours. It also isn't easy to set the example, to eat right yourself and maintain a healthy weight. But setting that example, leading from the front, being actively involved with your child – going to the park, playing sports, etc. – that is what will reverse the trend of obesity, and the message I'd like to get out to parents.

The Boys and Girls Club has introduced a program called Triple Play that has had good results. I believe it is programs like this, coupled with introducing healthier foods in school cafeterias (as well as removing the junk food in vending machines), that will provide the solution we are looking for without encroaching on our freedoms. You see, knowledge is a powerful thing. If you increase someone's knowledge, their responsibility and control will increase as well. Knowledge, responsibility, control – those three things go hand-in-hand. What we need to do is spend more time educating parents and children on proper nutrition, moderation, exercise, stress management, etc.

The USDA adopted and promoted the Food Guide Pyramid in 1992, and in my opinion, it has been an epic flop. It hasn't failed because its principle is unsound, but because of feeble presentation and implementation. I rarely see the Pyramid on TV, in magazines, etc. When I was in school, it was a topic covered in class within the span of an hour and then barely mentioned again the rest of the school year. We need to make healthy living a lifestyle.

I lived in Germany for three years (I am in the military) and saw firsthand that Europeans tend to eat smaller portions, go on frequent walks, etc. It is a part of their culture. That is what we should try to do here. We need to spend more money on after school programs that promote exercise. Our schools need to focus more heavily on educating kids on healthy living, and instilling it through repetition, by example, and a concerted effort to make it genuinely fun and entertaining. Parents need to be educated and motivated to take more responsibility. They need to take an active role, directing their children's attention and energy towards sports, the outdoors, etc., instead of letting them plop down on the couch and veg out in front of the TV.

Please focus on the root cause(s). Americans are a creative lot – let's work on developing solutions that won't detract from our freedoms and rights. Remember: knowledge,

responsibility, control. Increase any one of those three and you are bound to raise the other two.  
So educate!