Food Advertising to Children
IN THE FOOD RETAIL SECTOR
Foreword
Produced by the Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems (Weight Coalition), this report outlines advertising strategies aimed at children under the age of 13 in Quebec. It is part of a series of four documents that form a profile of food advertising directed at children in the food retail sector, fast-food and family restaurants, as well as family venues and events.

Information contained in the document may be cited provided that the source is mentioned.
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Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems
The mandate of the Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems (Weight Coalition), an initiative sponsored by the Association pour la santé publique du Québec, is to advocate for legislative, regulatory and public policy changes in an effort to foster the creation of healthy lifestyle-promoting environments that help prevent weight problems and chronic conditions.

The Weight Coalition has the support of more than 550 partners from the education, municipal, health, research, environment, nutrition and physical activity sectors.

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Introduction

Although Quebec law is generally effective at protecting children from advertising directed at them, there is inadequate oversight of such marketing at points of sale. Subject to certain conditions, the exceptions to the application of sections 248 and 249 of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) relate primarily to advertising in the retail sector, such as windows, shelves, containers, packaging or labels. These exceptions allow businesses to circumvent the spirit of the law by directly targeting children under 13 years of age.

For example, the packaging on certain products is brightly coloured and depicts imaginary characters, thereby engaging children. Food products, often of low nutritional quality, are associated with big and small screen heroes beloved by children. Some packaging includes offers of bonuses, toys or movie tickets. In addition, grocery store and supermarket shelves are bursting with displays that expressly target toddlers, increasing the buying pressure on parents. All these practices are variations on children’s advertising seen in the food retail sector.

According to the World Health Organization, settings where children gather should be free from all forms of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. Following this logic, food businesses are places where young children often accompany their parents and should be free from such advertising.

Documenting Children’s Advertising at Points of Sale

Visits were paid to different retailers belonging to various banners to identify all food product packaging with childish elements as part of their design, to the point of information saturation. Each package was described in an observation checklist identifying the techniques used to engage children, such as characters, references to magic or fantasy, shapes and bright colours, etc. Finally, all childish displays and displayed advertisements were also compiled.

As the inclusion criterion for packaging is generally childish appearance, some products that appeal strongly to children, such as cookies, popular cakes, or macaroni and cheese, are not part of our inventory. Where applicable, the conclusion to be drawn is that these products, although enjoyed by children, had only a picture of the product itself on the package, without other elements specifically aimed at children.

Chewing gum and most candies found in convenience and discount stores have been excluded from the food profile (e.g., Nerds, FunDip, Runts, Gobstopper, Air Heads, War Heads, PEZ) because of the large number of such products and because they are already recognized by Canadian parents as special products with little nutritional value. Only candies and chocolate bars placed conspicuously at the end of aisles, in childish displays or at checkouts (e.g., Kinder Surprise, M&M's, Sour Patch Kids) in grocery stores were recorded for this category of products.
Packaging Directed at Children

Over a period of six months, the inventory identified 469 examples of food product packaging aimed at children, including 73 examples of seasonal packaging, excluding gums, chocolates and candies, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables, and bottled water. Note that the same product was sometimes displayed in different packaging depending on the season or holiday.

Combination of Strategies

Children’s advertising is assessed by looking at the packaging as a whole. Sometimes only one heavily exploited strategy, such as the use of very bright colours or evoking magic, is enough to engage children's interest. However, products that target children generally use multiple techniques to interest them.

For the purposes of this review, the main methods of targeting children were divided into 14 strategies, namely the use of:

- references to magic, fantasy, action and adventure, or geometric shapes;
- positive images (humour, pleasure, independence, freedom, success);
- animated food that seems to be in motion;
- childish writing (puffy, unevenly sized, shaded or colourful letters, or a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters);
- popular characters (e.g., PAW Patrol, Dora the Explorer, Mickey Mouse);
- a brand character;
- colouring pictures, craft on the packaging;
- collectibles, gifts;
- foods as toys (in the shape of letters, animals, characters, etc.);
- contests, games, and sports competition;
- subscriptions to children’s clubs, birthday parties, or local events;
- partnerships with sports or recreation organizations that are of interest to children;
- promotions on packaging that appeal to children (discount coupons and special offers);
- attractive packaging size or shape (packaging in animal shapes or sized for small hands).
On average, the packages identified use 3.5 strategies that contribute to a generally childish appearance, i.e., between one and eight. Among the products identified, the product packaging with the highest number of strategies is the special Mickey Mouse edition of Goldfish crackers from Pepperidge Farm (Campbell's). This package includes a popular character, a brand character, a food-as-toy in the shape of fishes and Mickey heads, which seem animated, positive images (Mickey is all smiles), Mickey heads scattered like confetti (colourful shapes), childish lettering and a colouring game.

Next, the products that used the most tactics likely to capture children’s attention were Lucky Charms-brand cereal bars from General Mills and Post breakfast cereals. That said, the number of tactics used is not necessarily proportional to the potential appeal of the product among children.
Most Common Techniques

The most frequently observed advertising techniques include childish writing, positive images reflecting happiness, animated foods and the use of a character. Images alluding to magic, fantasy and adventure also appeared on 43% of the packages recorded.

Although all these techniques hit the mark, the use of a brand character or a character made popular by the small or big screen are considered particularly effective. In addition to capturing children's attention, the presence of characters on the packaging of nutrient-poor products may negatively influence children's eating habits, with children preferring them to other identical foods and even perceiving them as tasting better.

In this review, more than half of all regular packages featured a brand character (242 products) or a character popular among children, such as PAW Patrol, the Incredibles, the Minions or other Avengers or Disney characters (55 products).
Foods as Toys
We identified various types of foods considered to be toys. These are primarily foods shaped like animals, letters or characters, string cheeses, or baked goods to be decorated (e.g., gingerbread house). The food-as-toys strategy is mainly associated with crackers and cookies, representing 54 of the 96 food-as-toys identified. Breakfast cereals, pastas and confectionery products also use shaped foods.

The food-as-toys category could also include Kinder Surprise, chocolate eggs which contain toys. However, although these chocolates are offered in a wide variety, they fall into the candies and chocolates category and were not included in our inventory.
Fun or Tailored Packaging
Some molded packages are in a **fun shape** or a shape specially tailored to children. While it is less common, there were still 32 products in our inventory. Essentially, these consist primarily of chocolate syrups, honey containers, drinkable fruit purees and drinkable yogurts.

Strategies Less Commonly Used
Among the various strategies, some are more marginal, such as contests, collectibles, colouring pictures and crafts, sports partnerships, and special promotions or subscriptions. In our data collection, contests only appear on 21 products, half of which are cereal boxes. Only 11 products, primarily General Mills and Post breakfast cereals, feature collectibles.

 Colouring pictures and crafts are rarely used for regular products, having only been identified on Annie’s crackers, Dipps Unicorn granola bars, and Mickey Mouse Goldfish crackers. Only one partnership with a sports association, namely the one between Frosted Flakes and the National Hockey League (NHL), was identified. As for special promotions or rebates, most are not of interest to children (e.g., gas rebates). Only an offer of free movie tickets with the purchase of cereal was aimed at children.
Increased Number of Varieties

Offering a similar product in a wide range of varieties and packages makes it possible to take up more shelf space, thereby maximizing the visibility of the packages. Two products in particular stand out in this regard, namely Goldfish crackers and Bear Paws soft cookies. In total, 11 kinds of Goldfish crackers were identified (Flavor Blasted, Cheddar, Cheese Trio, Pretzel, etc.) and 15 kinds of Bear Paws soft cookies (Minis, My First Bear Paws, Morning Snack, Soft Granola, etc.). Most of these products are available all year round. Only two special edition versions were identified for each of these brands.

Some identical products, especially cereals, are also available in several different packages on a regular basis.
Products Most Commonly Advertised to Children

Breakfast Cereals
Breakfast cereals stand out among the categories of food products most frequently marketed directly to children. Cereal packages represent 76% of the products identified, or 16% of the products compiled. Of these 76, 10 packages are special seasonal editions for Christmas or Easter offered by General Mills and Kelloggs, companies that regularly change the appearance of their cereal packaging.

The fact that these products are heavily advertised to children is concerning, as children’s breakfast cereals are rarely good dietary choices. According to a study by the Institut sur la nutrition et les aliments fonctionnels (INAF) conducted for the Observatoire sur la qualité de l’offre alimentaire, a 55g serving of children’s breakfast cereal contains on average one additional teaspoon of sugar than a cereal directed at adults. Although it has been shown that children enjoy them just as much, better quality cereals directed at adults do not fare well next to candy-like cereals with multicoloured packaging and unusual shapes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s breakfast cereal packages by brand</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Mills</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelloggs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature’s Path</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Value</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that General Mills is also the company that owns the Pillsbury brand, for which 18 products of little nutritional value are extensively advertised to children, such as Toaster Strudel, turnovers or cookies.

Snacks
This broad category includes snack foods as well as bars and cookies. Dare, with its wide range of Bear Paws, and Christie, which offers a number of cookies with childish imagery, are among the companies that regularly use children’s advertising for cookies.

In terms of savoury snacks, Goldfish crackers from Pepperidge Farm (Campbell’s) figure prominently with their many varieties of flavours.
Main snack packages aimed at children by brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dare</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepperidge Farm</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President's Choice</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Value</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Monkey Popcorn</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clif Kid</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelloggs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frito Lay Canada</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frozen Desserts
Our review allowed us to identify **35 frozen desserts** with packaging aimed at children. Of these, five are special Christmas editions with uncommon flavours, such as a candy cane-flavoured ice cream. While we collected our data from October to April, it is important to note that this type of product tends to increase in numbers during the warmer months. The number of products identified therefore probably underestimate the reality.

Dairy Products
Products such as plain and flavoured milk, regular or drinkable yogurts, and cheeses are regularly marketed to children. In total, 59 dairy products (12.6% of all products) were identified. **Agropur** is the biggest player in this category for advertising to children, as it offers **27 packages** directed at them. Although some dairy products are healthy, the amount of sugar in most flavoured milks and yogurts contain a high amount of sugar.
### Dairy product packages aimed at children by brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agropur</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danone</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoplait</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Diamond</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Value</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinsley</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kraft</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bel Canada Cheese Products &amp; Brands</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Québon</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saputo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Pré</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sugary Drinks
The packaging of many sugary drinks specifically targets children.

### Few Healthy Foods Advertised
As at least one Canadian study has already shown, most products with packaging aimed at children are for nutrient-poor foods. During our photo collection from October 2018 to April 2019, we found little advertising to children of fresh, whole and minimally processed foods.

In addition to plain milk (16 regular or holiday products), we only identified **21 ads for fresh fruits and vegetables**. As these are not always packaged, childish stickers or cards are sometimes fastened to fruits to attract the attention of children. For example, the companies **Dole** and **Del Monte** use this strategy on their bananas and pineapples.
Furthermore, 12 ads for fruit purees were identified (nine varieties of GoGo Squeez, two Slammers and one Fruit Launcher fruit purees). Even if no refined sugar is added, they all contain certain fruit concentrates (juice or puree). None is made only of cooked and mashed fruit. As a result, they cannot be compared to fresh fruit when it comes to sugars.

A few single-use water bottles (10) from Evian, Nestlé and Bubly also had childish designs. Although water is the healthiest drink there is, bottled water is an increasingly unpopular product because of its harmful environmental impact and the availability of tap water, which is recognized as healthy and more environmentally friendly.

Finally, considering that Health Canada recommends less than 5% of the recommended daily value (DV) of sugar, sodium and saturated fat to identify products low in these nutrients, only a few products are added by broadening the definition of healthy products to include foods below this threshold. As a result, The Weight Coalition’s inventory identifies eight yogurts (three varieties of IÖGO nanō yogurt; two Danino drinkable yogurts by Danone and three Tubes yogurts by Yoplait) and Saint-Viateur bagels, whose nutrient profiles meet the requirement of containing less than 5% DV for a minimum serving of 50 g or more. One Kool-Aid product, one Diet Coke Christmas beverage and one Snack Pack product also meet this requirement, but were not included with the healthy products because of their high sweetener content. In short, the list of healthy foods advertised to children is still quite short.
Tasteless Claims
On product packages designed to appear childish, we often find one or more statements highlighting the nutrients in the product, the quality of an ingredient, or the absence of a substance consumers are trying to avoid. These claims pertaining to nutritional content and other positive attributes are found on many products that are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat, which is likely to cause confusion and mislead the parent.

Among the products catalogued by the Weight Coalition, the various claims appear primarily on packages of breakfast cereal, crackers, cookies and soft bars (e.g., Bear Paws, Oreo Mini, Chewy, School Safe) and dairy products.

These are a few examples:

- 0 trans fat or cholesterol, low in saturated fat
- Excellent source or source of protein/iron
- No preservatives, artificial flavours, sweeteners, peanuts or gluten
- GMO-free
- Certified organic
- Made with lots of good things!
- Made with real cheese
- Better choice
- Vegan
- Canadian oats/whole grains

Holiday and Special Editions: A Tactic of Major Players
Over the six-month observation period, a single product could be found in several different packages, whether because of new promotions, special seasonal editions or, a holiday or back-to-school occasion. While excluding chocolates and candies, we identified 73 packages designed especially for the Halloween and Christmas seasons.
However, for Valentine’s Day and Easter, it was mainly candies and chocolates that had holiday-themed packaging, with four exceptions: three cookies and one cake.

Fruits and vegetables generally have annual editions. Only one pineapple was seen with a small Christmas label, which even promoted an online children’s game.

New Nutritional Labelling Standards Seldom Applied

Companies that regularly change their packaging are mainly multinationals such as Kelloggs, General Mills and Post. Surprisingly, despite these frequent packaging changes, none of these companies has made the effort to adjust the Nutrition Facts table and list of ingredients based on the regulations that have been in effect since December 2016.

In our inventory, only four companies (Agropur, Cosmos Creations, Dare and Selection) apply the new Nutrition Facts table, for a total of nine packages. This accounts for less than 2% of our sample. In addition, Bad Monkey Popcorn has begun making changes to two of its new packages, but the list of ingredients still does not meet the most recent requirements.

Although companies have until December 2021 to implement them, this finding is disappointing as the new rules are intended to help the public better understand food labels and make more informed dietary choices.

Some Grey Areas

It is hard to say whether some packaging constitutes advertising aimed at children. When in doubt, the products were not included in our inventory.

Overall Impression

Some products contain elements that may appeal to children, but their general appearance is more geared towards adults.
For example, although the brand name appears in colourful, bubbly letters with the drawing of a bird, the actual box of Goglu cookies was not included in the category of packaging that targets children. It was determined that the small bird was not drawn in a childish way and that the background against which the cookie is shown, accompanied by a cup of tea and a black-and-white photo depicting an old town setting, was not especially appealing to youth.

The “Celebration Moments” edition of Old Dutch BBQ chips was not identified as a product aimed at children for the same reason. Although one of the frames shown on the packaging may appeal to them by evoking the pleasure of sharing a bag of chips with friends, the overall impression given by the bag of BBQ chips is not childish.

**Clear Packaging**

Using clear packaging through which children can see foods they like or brightly coloured drinks is a marketing strategy. However, even if the product appeals to children, it cannot be said that the packaging is direct advertising. That said, some neutral or translucent packaging allows other childish packaging to be viewed. This type of packaging can be seen, for example, on individually wrapped chocolates or candies that appear childish.
Characters That Do Not Look Very Childish
In rare exceptions, the use of a character does not allow us to confirm with certainty that it consists of child-directed advertising. For example, some characters have more of an old-fashioned appearance or are depicted in black and white, seeming to appeal more to adult nostalgia. As a result, these Nantes carrots from Quebec and this lettuce were not included in this review.

Preteen Design
Bubble lettering, bright colours and splashes are all graphic elements that children like. However, when advertising is confined to these techniques, one could argue that the packaging was really designed to target teens. These youthful products, whose packaging straddles the line between a clearly childish appearance and a teen aesthetic, were not included in the inventory. However, they could be considered advertising to children as they are likely to appeal to preteens (ages 9-12). This is the case of many drink packages, especially from the brands Fruité, Fanta, Five Alive, Crush and Fruitopia.
Other products were also excluded from the inventory because of a more teenage appearance, such as most Dipps-brand bars, with their black background, YoCrunch Twix yogurt, and Zap'ems Taco Bites.
Displays

Displays designed to appeal to youth are used extensively in Quebec, be it in food businesses, grocery stores or drug stores.

Childish displays are used mainly by the major industry companies as most displays feature the products of multinational companies. The inventory includes only one Quebec company that uses displays directed at children: BadMonkey Popcorn. Their playful displays feature stuffed toys and balloons shaped like the brand character.

Type of Displays Directed at Children

Several types of displays exist. Although some are made of plastic, in most cases displays consist of a cardboard structure placed in the middle or at the end of an aisle or near the checkouts. In their simplest form, displays are made of shipping boxes with appealing graphics that are stacked and opened on one side to expose the product. Other displays recreate a cardboard shelf display above which an image or character appealing to children sometimes appears. More recently, displays that form central shelving decorated with posters on some corners have appeared. Finally, some displays resemble mascots in that they consist of a molded brand character the size of a child, on which a small quantity of products are placed. In their most complex form, we observed an impressive set-up combining posters and cardboard structures to depict a large-scale object or three-dimensional shape.
Junk Food Featured on Childish Displays

As was noted for packages that advertise foods to children, most displays where the design is childish are used to promote nutrient-poor foods. Candies, chocolate, sugary breakfast cereals and highly processed snacks are often showcased through these shelving accessories. There are some exceptions, such as bottled water, peanut butter and mandarin oranges.
Popular Techniques

Characters
Most of the catalogued displays are directed at children using childish characters, joyful images and bright colours to enhance the product. Often, the brand character found on the product packaging is often featured. These are a few examples we identified:

- the BadMonkey monkey catching popcorn or shown with his head sticking out of a bag;
- the Cheerios cereal bee waving his fist in the air while pointing at a pullover from the brand;
- Tony the Tiger from Frosted Flakes cereal looking hungrily at his bowl of cereal or playing hockey.

While the use of an animal shape is widespread among the childish characters that represent various brands, some companies have opted instead to animate and personify the food itself. This is specifically the case for M&M’s candies and Maynard’s Sour Patch gummies.
In other cases, **characters known and meaningful to children** are used. These may be Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse, Emojis, or characters from animated or successful films.

**Holidays**

The world surrounding major holidays is heavily exploited to promote festive limited-edition products or packages. Displays featuring the characters and different symbols associated with an occasion like Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day or Easter begin to appear one to two months before the holiday. For example, a realistic-looking or animated rabbit is often used around Easter. The Christmas season brings with it Christmas trees, traditional stockings, Santa Claus, stars, snow, reindeers and so on.
**Sport**

Sports, especially hockey, are also used to reach children. In most cases, these brightly coloured displays feature a partnership between a product or brand and the National Hockey League. For example, there is the display advertising a contest and depicting a child attending a hockey game, screaming behind the glass from the stands. Another display encourages purchasing products to “encourage the team”.

These partnerships contribute to the continued normalization of the association between sports and junk food.

**Surprises and Contests**

The use of displays directed at children to promote gifts, collectibles or contests is common. Ferrero, with its regularly changing displays, makes particular use of this practice as it offers a variety of collectible toys in its Kinder Surprise eggs. We identified an ad for a draw to win tickets to a hockey game and a movie ticket offer with the purchase of several M&M's products. In addition to conventional displays, this type of advertising to reach children was also observed on poster displays.
Poster Displays
A new type of display has recently made an appearance. In addition to promoting the product, these poster displays act as showcases to expose children to the offer of gifts or collectibles. During the data collection period, a children’s t-shirt offer and another offer for socks depicting the Avengers was observed on certain displays. According to the Weight Coalition, these poster displays are more akin to displayed advertising than to shelving. Complaints have been filed with the Office de la protection du consommateur (OPC), which will assess if the law has been broken if an exemption applies.

Mascot Displays
Made up of molded plastic brand characters, these playful, attractive displays showcase the brand and contain a low volume of products. They are popular with young children; it is not uncommon to see children approaching and touching them as they would do with a mascot. As with poster displays, one might question their legitimacy and inclusion as one of the practices exempted from the application of Quebec law.
**Other Examples of Displays***

Since 2010, the Weight Coalition has been documenting other types of displays directed at children, which completes the review developed between October 2018 and April 2019.
Displayed Advertisements
Although less common than other practices, advertising posters of different sizes were catalogued. Complaints about many of them have been filed with the Office de la protection du consommateur as they seem to break Quebec law.

First, large-scale advertising panels were catalogued. One was placed above a dairy case to promote Natrel chocolate milk; another at a grocery store food counter was for Slush Puppie; one promoting M&M’s was hung from the ceiling of a Walmart some time before Halloween; and a final one, in the same banner, promoted a special edition of crackers.
Pillsbury ads were also identified in a refrigerated display located in the middle of an aisle. A large-scale sticker filled much of the glass, while small childish cardboard ads were suspended inside the display.

Finally, the Weight Coalition also identified child-friendly advertising placards attached perpendicularly to the permanent shelves of certain grocery stores. Small or medium in size, they promoted Oasis juices, Pepperidge Farm (Campbell’s) cheese-flavoured crackers, Dare crackers and IÖGO drinking yogurts.
Shelving Practices
The documentation of shelving techniques has generally not been included in the review as there is a clear exemption under Quebec law and the federal government has not indicated any intention of regulating these practices. However, some tactics are worth mentioning.

Cross Promotion
In some grocery stores, small toys, place mats or other merchandise can be found near foods that appeal to children. Such merchandise is hung from shelves to draw their attention. This type of promotion was especially prevalent near sugary drinks, children’s cereals, cookies and jams. There is good reason to question the presence of this type of merchandise in a store whose main purpose is to sell fast-moving consumer goods.

In two stores, this type of promotion was seen with promotional material from Cheerios brand cereals.
Product Placement

Shelf space and the layout of food products in stores are two more ways to target children.\textsuperscript{8} These spaces, which are negotiated between companies and retailers, have an impact on food product sales and, therefore, on consumers’ eating habits. First of all, the more space a product occupies on shelves, the more conducive it is to sales of that product. Secondly, products that occupy shelf-space in the middle of aisles and are placed at eye-level for most consumers, but also at eye-level and within reach of young children sitting in shopping carts, sell more than those placed on top or bottom shelves\textsuperscript{9}. Row ends and checkout-adjacent counters are also prime spots for increasing sales and buying pressure on parents.\textsuperscript{10,11} Companies know that this is a worthwhile investment and do not hesitate to pay grocery store chains large sums of money to ensure that their products are placed in these locations.\textsuperscript{12,13}

Although it does not fall directly into the category of children’s advertising, products featured at retail store checkouts are generally nutrient poor and appealing to children. Given that people often have to wait to pay for their purchases and that these products are arranged at a height accessible to children, children are likely to ask their parents to buy them, encouraging impulse purchases. At a time when excess weight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases represent a significant societal burden, it would be advisable to begin thinking about more responsible shelving practices that are more respectful of families’ choices. One example would be promoting the availability of certain junk food-free checkouts, as has been done in other countries.

The United Kingdom plans to ban the sale of junk food at checkouts, row ends and store entrances to reduce childhood obesity.\textsuperscript{14} Tesco, Great Britain’s largest supermarket chain, has already moved all treats away from checkouts. It has been reported that consumers appreciate this approach and feel that it helps make for a more pleasant shopping experience when they have their children with them.\textsuperscript{15}
Examples of Checkout-Adjacent Shelving

The Weight Coalition noted that the checkout counters of every major grocery store and drug store chain it visited feature shelving for chocolate bars, confectionery products or chips. A refrigerator full of sugary drinks was also found at the end of certain shelves.

Some products that are especially appealing to children, such as Kinder Surprise and M&M’s, are placed on the bottom shelves at the checkout, making them easier to access.

Big box stores and drug stores also sometimes force consumers to make their way through and wait in a single lane of displays and shelves featuring nutrient-poor products in order to get to the checkout.
References


