

Short Commentary

The Impact of Packaged Food on Children's Health: Strategies to Overcome

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ABSTRACT

Background: Packaged foods are often high in sugar, salt, fat, additives, preservatives, artificial colors, and flavors but low in nutrients. These factors may lead to weight gain, delayed growth and development, type 2 diabetes, damage to the teeth, food poisoning, and many other health problems. This short commentary has critically examined the effects of packaged food on children's health, along with possible solutions.

Main Idea: Packaged food may be convenient, but it is often full of unsafe ingredients harmful to a child's developing body. The best way to ensure that children get the nutrition they need while avoiding the potential health hazards of packaged food is to make meals from scratch at home. This allows for controlling the ingredients in the meal and ensuring the child gets a balanced, nutritious diet. Eating out less often and cutting back on processed foods can also help reduce the amount of packaged food a child consumes. Additionally, educating children about the importance of healthy eating can help to establish healthy habits.

Conclusion: The impact of packaged food on children's health is an increasingly important issue. Considering the potential harm of packaged foods to children's health, parents must remove them from their children's diet as much as possible and use foods prepared at home.

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Highlights

- An issue that is becoming more crucial is how packaged food affects children's health.
- Comparing packaged food to home-cooked meals, packaged food has higher concentrations of sugar, salt, fat, and calories, increasing a child's risk of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes, among other health issues.
- Eating out less and cutting back on processed foods can also help reduce the amount of packaged food a child consumes.
- Educating children about the importance of healthy eating can help reduce the consumption of packaged food.

Plain Language Summary

Packaged foods are often high in sugar, salt, fat, additives, preservatives, artificial colors, and flavors but low in nutrients. These substances often lead to weight gain, delayed growth and development, type 2 diabetes, damage to teeth, food poisoning, and many other health problems. It is recommended that parents avoid giving packaged food to their children as much as possible and prepare meals from scratch at home. Eating out less and reducing the consumption of processed foods can also help reduce the amount of packaged food a child eats. Also, teaching children about healthy eating can help them develop healthy habits.

1. Introduction

The appearance of food packaging is important for grabbing kids' and parents' attention, creating associations with the brand, and influencing their purchasing behavior. Children and their parents may be persuaded to purchase calorie-dense food items with excessive amounts of sugar, fat, and sodium by packaging components that appeal to kids and by deceptive health-related visual and textual cues (Gil-Pérez, et al., 2020). The appearance of food packaging is crucial for grabbing kids' and parents' attention, creating connections with the brand, and influencing their purchasing behaviour (Ares et al., 2022).

Front-of-package labeling (FOPL) is recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a way to give easily accessible, intelligible nutrition information. To help all customers make informed food purchases and healthier dietary choices, FOPL's main goal is to deliver informative, eye-catching, and simple-to-understand nutrition information that is provided at the point of decision-making (I.B. workshop: Front-of-pack nutrition labelling: Recent progress and remaining challenges, 2020). Generally, having FOPL helps customers distinguish between good and unhealthy food products (Khandpur et al., 2019). The WHO defines food labeling as any text, printed image, or graphic that appears on the packaging, is displayed next to the food, or is

printed on the label and serves to advertise its sale or disposal (Hernández et al., 2021). In recent years, the role of packaging design in the marketing of kid-friendly food products has grown (Ares et al., 2016). The main goals of food labels are to inform consumers and promote the product. However, the information contained on food labels has evolved. The goals of food labeling have changed and gotten more complicated over the past few years due to the influence of food legislation, food companies, retailers, public authorities, and consumers (Cheftel, 2005).

Effect of packed food

Due to their excessive consumption of foods high in sugar, fat, and sodium, and their deficiency in fruits and vegetables, children's diets worldwide are far from ideal food (McGovern, 2000). Unhealthy diets, which are a major contributor to child sickness, hinder children's ability to grow and develop to their full potential (Law et al., 2020). Since they typically have high energy densities and excessive amounts of added sugar and fat, most items marketed to children are not nutritionally suitable (Castelló-Martínez & Tur-Viñes, 2021). The research study findings show broad trends in methodological approaches (content analysis, 38%), outcomes assessed (exposure, 44%), and age. According to studies looking at the nutritional composition of packaged meals marketed towards children, 41% to 97% of the goods are harmful (Elliott et al., 2020).

The food industry needs more regulatory guidelines to create packaging that may help parents and encourage children to eat healthily since appealing aesthetics tempt kids to purchase unhealthy goods (Abrams et al., 2015).

Children not only have a direct impact on parents' dietary choices through their "pester power" but also indirectly. Parents frequently choose foods that suit children's preferences. This is why giving children unhealthy things, such as candies, is common practice as gifts to show them that you care (Law et al., 2020).

Unhealthy eating habits are one of today's most prevalent problems, and using packaged or ready-to-eat food has greatly contributed to this problem. Kids are constantly drawn to these foods, which prevents them from consuming the right nutrients. Proper nutrition affects a person's total health, including how they feel, look, function, perform in school or college, behave, and have energy, all of which make up their lifestyle. No matter how many unhealthy preservatives, excessive amounts of salt or sugar, chemical-based ingredients, or artificial flavors are present in their favorite packaged foods, kids are still easily lured by them. Such foods lack vital nutrients and are often hard to digest (Kupka et al., 2020). Obesity and non-communicable diseases caused by unhealthy foods are major killers and have been linked to serious consequences (Gil-Pérez et al., 2020).

There are many potential health hazards associated with eating packed food. The main hazard is the risk of food poisoning, which can occur when food is not properly stored or handled. Other potential hazards include allergic reactions, choking, and gastrointestinal issues. Symptoms of food poisoning may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps. In severe cases, food poisoning can lead to dehydration, organ failure, and death. Allergic reactions are another potential hazard of packed food (Wei, 2021).

Strategy to overcome

Regulations should prohibit misleading health-related visual and textual cues since they influence children's and adults' perceptions of and propensity to make healthy choices. Images of nutritious foods and references to homemade foods on the packaging, particularly, merit special attention since they are potent sources of linkages with health and hedonic expectations (Wei, 2021).

Making your jams or chutneys is the only solution. Any variety of alternatives can be utilized with a custom recipe. For instance, natural sweeteners like jaggery,

dates, figs, and honey can be used in place of foods that contain sugar. We never use any artificial food flavoring or coloring at home. Simply eating homemade cuisine is a blessing. It is brimming with freshness and purity. Branded foods that include certain fruits and vegetables are always marketed as healthy and recommended for consumption. Although it is said that they are abundant in fiber to sate your sudden hunger, the truth is that hand-made food cannot stay fresh for even a month. How can we ignore items from the grocery store that have been stored for months or years, such as a jar of jam, a packet of soup, or a bottle of energy drink (Kupka et al., 2020)?

Packaged foods will always exist in the market and cannot be prevented from being produced; therefore, most strategies should be focused on parents. However, few things parents can do to help their children overcome the side effects of packed food:

1. Ensure the child has had a nutritious breakfast in the morning. This will give them the energy they need to get through the day (International Medical Aid, 2022).
2. Include plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in their diet. These foods are packed with essential nutrients for good health (Hoare et al., 2018).
3. Make sure your toddler drinks plenty of water all day long. This will keep them hydrated and assist their body in getting rid of any toxins that may be present (International Medical Aid, 2022).
4. Make sure that they get plenty of exercise. The exercise will help boost their metabolism and help burn off any excess calories they may have consumed (Hoare et al., 2018).
5. Finally, limit the amount of processed and sugary foods the child eats. These foods can negatively impact their health and contribute to weight gain (International medical aid, 2022).

2. Conclusion

Food package design has become an essential component of the marketing mix for companies looking to ensure the long-term success of their products and communicate information that sets them apart from competitors' products. Television is among the first and most private exposures to commercial food promotion. It follows that there is ample evidence of how television advertising affects children's brand preferences. However, its effect on actual food consumption and food preferences in

children with various weight statuses has only recently been found. Poor eating habits directly impact children's health, which can also cause obesity and heart disease, among other chronic conditions. Due to their frequent high sugar, salt, and fat content, packaged foods play a significant role in bad dietary practices. Parents and caregivers should be urged to restrict certain foods from their children's diets.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

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Conflict of interest

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