

News story: Restrictions on adverts for food high in fat, sugar and salt: public asked for views

A new [public consultation](#) asks people for their views on ways to reduce the number of adverts for foods high in fat, sugar and salt that children are exposed to.

The consultation sets out proposals to tighten advertising restrictions. The restrictions will limit children's exposure across the media they engage with most, as part of efforts to tackle childhood obesity.

The restrictions being considered include a 9pm watershed ban on TV, online streaming sites and social media. The restrictions have been designed with a view to encourage industry to develop healthier alternatives.

Data shows children are spending many hours each week watching television and an increasing amount of time online.

Adverts for sugary and fatty foods are more commonly shown than any other category. In 2017, it is estimated that children were exposed to more than 700 million online adverts for foods high in fat, sugar or salt and almost 3.6 billion TV adverts.

Exposure levels on TV have fallen significantly since restrictions around children's programmes were introduced 10 years ago, but there remains a significant amount of exposure.

Evidence suggests advertising can affect what and when children eat, both just after seeing an advert and in the longer term by shaping children's food preferences from a young age. This has the potential to affect their likelihood to become or remain overweight as adults.

The proposals would target foods that contribute most to children's intake of calories. The restrictions would not apply to everyday staples like butter, oil or meat.

As part of the consultation, the government will consider the impact that further advertising restrictions may have on business, particularly broadcasters.

Currently, one in 3 children are overweight or obese and the number of severely obese children is on the rise. The proposals are part of a series of measures that will support the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) and help to halve childhood obesity by 2030.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We often talk about internet safety and how social media can affect our children's mental health and we are rightly taking action to address that. But what about their physical health? I want my children to grow up knowing what a balanced diet looks like – but their perception of what is healthy can get skewed when the vast majority of adverts they see on screen are for sugary snacks and fast food.

We know these adverts are shown on TV during prime family viewing time, and the evidence suggests this is increasingly being mirrored online too. With a scant 1% of adverts for fruit and vegetables, it's clear there is plenty of room to balance things out. We led the world with our soft drinks levy and today we are proposing to take similar world-first action – for the good of our children's health.

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary of State Jeremy Wright said:

We know that childhood obesity is one of the biggest health problems that our country faces. With children spending more time online it's vital that we look at all options to help us take action and improve the health of the nation.

The UK already has some of the toughest advertising restrictions in the world, but it is only right that we explore the impact that further action on TV and online advertising for products that are high in fat, salt or sugar will have on childhood obesity.

Steve Brine, Public Health Minister, said:

It is not right that our children are mainly exposed to adverts promoting foods high in fat, sugar and salt. Small amounts of excess calories every day over a long time causes obesity. But the evidence is clear that there is no one solution so our plan is about pulling together all the pieces of the jigsaw and tackling childhood obesity from all possible angles.

In fact, the NHS is already preparing to treat more and more children for the serious effects of extreme obesity in the future – so we surely have a duty to address the underlying cause. This isn't about banning everyday staples like butter and olive oil, it's about reducing children's exposure to those products that have little nutritional value but that are part of a wider climate that is driving childhood obesity.