

The Use of Sports Sponsorships in Food Marketing

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Context: Sports sponsorship as a means of marketing unhealthy foods has been studied too little.

Objective: To assess the prevalence of food company sponsorships of sports organizations popular among youth aged 2-17 years, and to examine product nutritional quality and marketing expenditures for the promoted brands.

Design: Ten sports organizations were selected based on the number of youth who watched their televised events during 2009. Sponsors were sorted into 11 categories of industries, including food/beverages. The nutritional quality of the most highly marketed food products for sponsorship brands were assessed using a Nutrient Profiling Index (NPI) while beverages were evaluated based on the percentage of calories from added sugar. Marketing data were collected from Nielsen and the Joyce Julius company.

Results: Children viewed nearly 6,000 sports telecasts during 2009 across all organizations in the sample. Sports programs in the sample were viewed 825,471,000 times by children.

Food/beverages represented the largest sponsorship category (20%). Eighty percent (79.5%) of sponsors' food products were unhealthy and 58.5% of beverages received 100% of calories from added sugar. Sponsors cumulatively spent 88.3% of their marketing dollars promoting unhealthy

products. When taking into account both viewership and the nutrition quality of sponsors' products, the National Football League has the most promotion of unhealthy foods, followed by World Wrestling Entertainment and the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Conclusions: Sports sponsorships are commonly used to market unhealthy food/beverage products and brands, and young people view large numbers of these sponsorship messages.

Sports Organization	Index Score*
NFL	91.0
WWE	81.9
NCAA	78.9
NBA	77.3
MLB	76.6
NASCAR	76.4
Olympics	76.3
FIFA	75.0
TNA	75.0
X Games	75.0

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