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Abstract

Objectives

To explore how time spent watching television (TV) is associated with the dietary behaviours of New Zealand children and young adolescents.

Design

Secondary data analysis of a nationally representative, cross-sectional survey.

Setting

In homes or schools of New Zealand school students.

Participants

In total, 3275 children aged 5 to 14 years.

Results

The odds of being overweight or obese increased with duration of TV viewing for children and adolescents when controlling for age, sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status and physical activity. Children and adolescents who watched the most TV were significantly more likely to be higher consumers of foods most commonly advertised on TV: soft drinks and fruit drinks, some sweets and snacks, and some fast foods. Both children and adolescents watching two or more hours of TV a day were more than twice as likely to drink soft drinks five times a week or more ($P = 0.03$ and $P = 0.04$, respectively), eat hamburgers at least once a week (both $P = 0.02$), and eat French fries at least once a week (both P

Conclusions

These findings suggest that longer duration of TV watching (thus, more frequent exposure to advertising) influences the frequency of consumption of soft drinks, some sweets and snacks, and some fast foods among children and young adolescents. Efforts to curtail the amount of time children spend watching TV may result in better dietary habits and weight control for children and adolescents. Future studies examining the impact of advertising on children's diets through interventions and international comparisons of legislation would provide more definitive evidence of the role of advertising in child and adolescent obesity.

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