



ASO response to the DCMS consultation on product placement

The Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the DCMS consultation on television product placement. Please note that the ASO is only commenting on the placement of food and drink products.

The ASO is the UK's foremost organisation dedicated to the understanding and treatment of obesity. The Association has three key objectives:

- To promote professional awareness of obesity and its impact on health.
- To educate and disseminate recent research on the causes, consequences, treatment, and prevention of obesity
- To prioritise obesity and provide opinion leadership in the UK.

Comments

The ASO is of the view that TV product placement of food and drinks (including alcoholic drinks) should continue to be prohibited in the UK.

There is evidence that television food and drink advertising effects purchasing habits, product requests to parents ("pestering"), food preferences / choices, and calorie / macronutrient intake. There is no reason to assume that the effect of product placement will differ. Restrictions on advertising foods high in sugar, fat and salt during children's viewing time have been in place since 2007. The proposals seriously risk undermining the important progress that has been made in protecting children from the marketing of these foods which are inconsistent with key public health goals.

Children can determine the difference between advertising and programming from a relatively young age, however, product placement allows promotion of

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foods and drinks by well-respected and highly liked actors and characters without the evident barrier between programming and advertising. This promotion of products links particular foods and drinks with highly aspirational contexts and characters; children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to associating specific products with appealing characters and events. This is likely to undermine some of the messaging issued by Government through Change4Life which advocates eating less, moving more and living longer. Product placement has the potential to encourage eating more of foods which are high in energy, in portions which are larger than recommended and in contexts which are not desirable (e.g. watching TV).

The pervasive promotion of foods and drinks (including alcoholic drinks) high in calories, sugar or fat, through subtle product placement techniques, contributes to the obesogenic environment and is unhelpful for both children and adults struggling to maintain a healthy weight. Any safeguards to protect children – such as prohibiting placement in programmes aimed at children or those with a disproportionately high child audience – would be insufficient as many children watch programmes aimed at adults.

Although not our preferred option, if the decision is taken to allow some product placement on UK television, we would urge DCMS to prohibit product placement of food and drinks before the 9pm watershed.

The ASO will welcome continued involvement in this work.

Association for the Study of Obesity January 2010

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