

A toy story: Association between young children's knowledge of fast food toy premiums and their fast food consumption.

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A toy story: Association between young children's knowledge of fast food toy premiums and their fast food consumption

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Highlights

- Half of 3–5 year olds ate fast food in the past 7 days; one-third ate at McDonalds.
- Children's knowledge of toy premiums was associated with eating at McDonalds.
- Toy knowledge was not associated with eating at other fast food restaurants.

Abstract

Fast food restaurants spend millions of dollars annually on child-targeted marketing, a substantial portion of which is allocated to toy premiums for kids' meals. The objectives of this study were to describe fast food toy premiums, and examine whether young children's knowledge of fast food toy premiums was associated with their fast food consumption. Parents of 3- to 5-year old children were recruited from pediatric and WIC clinics in Southern New Hampshire, and completed a cross-sectional survey between April 2013 and March 2014. Parents reported whether their children usually knew what toys were being offered at fast food restaurants, and whether children had eaten at any of four restaurants that offer toy premiums with kids' meals (McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Wendy's) during the 7 days preceding the survey. Seventy-one percent of eligible parents participated ($N = 583$); 48.4% did not receive any education beyond high school, and 27.1% of children were non-white. Half (49.7%) the children had eaten at one or more of the four fast food restaurants in the past week; one-third (33.9%) had eaten at McDonald's. The four restaurants released 49 unique toy premiums during the survey period; McDonald's released half of these. Even after controlling for parent fast food consumption and sociodemographics, children were 1.38 (95% CI = 1.04, 1.82) times more likely to have consumed McDonald's if they usually knew what toys were offered by fast food restaurants. We did not detect a relationship between children's toy knowledge and their intake of fast food from the other restaurants. In this community-based sample, young children's knowledge of fast food toys was associated with a greater frequency of eating at McDonald's, providing evidence in support of regulating child-directed marketing of unhealthy foods using toys.



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Keywords

Fast food; Toy premiums; Children; Fast food consumption

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