

"Children do not always have the maturity and cognitive development to make the healthiest food choices/particularly in a society where they are heavily targeted by the food industry." (1) This statement from the New Zealand Medical Journal in my opinion has a underlining of being biased and doesn't look at all different types of children because I believe that different types of children have the knowledge to make the right food decision but, when they are thrown fast food vouchers as rewards, they are getting mixed messages. Which leads me to think the current trend of raising funds for school sports teams and special activities by selling food products high in fat and sugar is impacting on the health of NZ society.

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We have to partly point the finger at parents for the number of overweight children in our country. One in five New Zealand children were overweight in 2006-2007 and one in twelve was obese and those children were more likely to remain obese into their adulthood. These statistics from the fast food sponsors article (NZ Herald (2)) should be a wakeup call to the type of parents who were discovered in the health survey that 70% of children between the ages of two and fourteen years ate fast food at least once a week, 14% ate fast food twice a week and 7% ate it three or more times a week. The parents of the modern day world are pressured to have their children achieve beyond the classroom so participating in extra curricula activities (swimming, dancing, music, scouts, speech and drama, horse riding) to give them all the opportunities they feel pressured to provide. With full time working parents and no time to prepare a full nutrients meal they don't have any easy choice and sometimes take the convenience option of takeaways. Or they send children to school with a little cash to purchase food from the school canteen. What parents may not know is they are harming their children by doing this, as some parents do up to three times a week (5). Also adding to their future of illnesses and high treatment costs such as diabetes. Diabetes is only one of the many illnesses a parent feeding their child takeaways is at risk of, diabetes-related medical costs have been estimated at 5600 million a year about three per cent of national health spending the NZ herald stated. (2)

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Mr Chester said "indirect marketing such as sponsorship of charities or sports events by fast food giants has become an ingrained part of society and many people did not notice it happening."(2) I agree with this statement because most fast foods outlets such as McDonalds use birthday parties, playgrounds and clowns to bring children in and now spends 1.4 billion dollars on advertising each year. Advertising has been known to have ten times more influence over children than parents. Now compare that to the two million the five plus a day spends on their advertising. "Supersize me" (3) adds that most advertised foods are eaten the most. This brainwashes the children and makes them more vulnerable to the fast foods especially when they are given the vouchers as rewards. To achieve this schools and sports teams will need to look elsewhere for money for fundraising events (sports, school camps, books, equipment and technology).

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The multi-National food industries like Cadbury and McDonalds have become part of the school fundraising industries by supporting them in giving them vouchers to the McDonalds outlets for player of the day in their sports teams and Cadbury by giving the schools chocolate bars to sell and keep a profit from the number of sales they make. This does help the schools education and the money they make through these sales can benefit the school in many ways but why aren't the parents and the coaches of the sports teams questioning how this could be affecting the children's health and lifestyle. McDonalds and Cadbury are using the children and their schools as a market tool. Cadbury gets the children to go door to door selling their chocolate. Children's parents usually feel obliged to buy a few bars too off

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their children and the children usually end up eating it so they are allowing these foods to become a pattern in their usual lifestyle. Then they question why do our children crave foods high in fat and sugar, well it has become part of their lifestyle. (6) These foods have been used as a positive icon and memories so no wonder they turn to them throughout their life if it brings back the same kind of feelings they remember when they were kids.

Schools that are using high in fat and sugar foods to fundraise for school related equipment or activities are the schools that are sending their students mixed messages about healthy eating. Every week in New Zealand primary and intermediate schools the average total of food items sold at school canteens is around 272 044, with the main food items being pies ("55 882 sold every week"), potato chips ("27 750 sold every week"), and the main drinks being juice ("31 920 sold every week") and soft drinks ("18 868 sold every week"). (4) These foods provide unneeded calories and displace healthier choices. They are chosen by the canteens because they have the greatest profit margin, are mostly premade and they are popular choices with the students. Canteens add to the mixed messages young children are facing every day at school. Likewise, research has indicated that school food rules about sweets and savoury snacks are associated with individual student's consumption of these types of foods. (1) If a child is given a little pocket money for feeding the family pet every day and they choose to spend that on the canteen at school it is almost out of the parents control because the child should have the right to spend their money where they choose. It should be the schools responsibility to make sure that the messages they are preaching about in class are reinforced in the playground and the canteen. New Zealand's children have been taught the right thing to eat but can easily be influenced by their peers to fit in. This will always be an ongoing problem for children when they sit down to eat their lunch with their class mates if the school doesn't set rules on the canteen products the other children may be eating.

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What everyone should be concerned about the most is how canteens and fundraisers in school can be affecting the student's development and wellbeing. By being encouraged to eat foods full of fat and sugar is pushing the children more towards facing problems – 'Childhood obesity has immediate effects on physical health and well-being (such as orthopaedic problems and lowered fitness), future disease risk (such as increased blood pressure and adverse blood lipid levels) and mental health.' (4) These may be too far into the future to panic about them now but what will happen to the children who are eating these foods at the moment, they will start lacking in participation in sports and physical activities because foods high in fat and sugar won't be providing them with the long lasting energy they will require. This will impact their social life as they will start being left out of lunch time games if they can't keep up or get tired too quickly and will need to rest. They won't be motivated to set or achieve any physical goals where they have to push themselves which could lead to depression later in life. If they don't create and build on these vital skills to live a happy healthy life at the primary and secondary school age they may never have the skills to motivate/challenge or fight for something they want in life. Children's feelings will get hurt when another kid calls them fat or any name calling in secondary school if they have been living off foods high in fat and sugar all through primary school.

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(References 1 to 6 were listed.)