Should Junk Food Commercials Be Banned?

You see dozens of junk food commercials a day. Are they bad for your health?

By Laura Toffler-Corrie

This weekend, when you're plopped on the couch watching your favorite shows on Nick or Disney, count the number of commercials for an unhealthy food. Fruit by the Foot? That's one. Cinnamon Toast Crunch? That's two. McDonald's, Burger King . . . soon you'll lose count.

Kids between the ages of 8 and 12 see an average of 21 food ads every day, mostly for fast food and sugary, fatty snacks. Maybe these commercials don't bother you. But they bother health experts. In fact, many say that junk food ads should be banned from kids' shows completely.

Why? Because these commercials are designed to tantalize you so much that you'll nag your mom or dad until they buy the food you saw advertised. And guess what? That's exactly what happens. Studies show that kids who watch junk food commercials are more likely to eat junk food.

Also, many commercials imply that some junky foods—like highly sugared breakfast cereals—are healthy. That means kids aren't getting a realistic idea of what they should be eating on a daily basis to stay strong and nourished.

Why all the worry? Today, 17 percent of children and teens in America are dangerously overweight, which means they are more likely to develop serious conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Getting rid of junk food commercials, experts say, is an important step toward making America's kids healthier. Some big food companies have willingly removed such commercials from kids' channels. In 2005, Kraft stopped airing ads for products like Oreos, Chips Ahoy, and most Oscar Mayer Lunchables during TV programs aimed at kids age 6 to 11. "We recognize that parents are concerned about advertising to young children," said Kraft spokesperson Mark Berlind.
But not everyone agrees that banning junk food ads from TV will make a difference. Dan Cooper, a doctor at the University of California, says, “If you got rid of junk food commercials and didn’t change anything else, there would still be a problem.” The real problem, say experts like Cooper, is that kids spend too much time watching TV and playing video games. Kids need to be exercising—at least an hour a day. Fewer than a third of American kids come close to that. Parents need to educate kids about nutrition and be stricter about what their kids eat.

Most experts agree that kids should lead healthier lives. Michelle Obama has even made kids’ health a focus of her work as First Lady. The question is: Will banning junk food commercials really help American kids get healthy?

What Do You Think?
Should junk food commercials be banned from kids’ TV?
Go back to the article and find information to support each side. Write the information on the lines below.

**YES** Get rid of those commercials!

1. 
2. 
3. 

**NO** Commercials aren’t the problem.

1. 
2. 
3. 

Study the points on both sides of the argument—and think about your own opinion. Then decide what you think about this issue. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.