

FitFUTURE

Strategies for
Better Living.

Could the media have a negative impact on your child's health?

by Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD, CDN

Children spend hours using media through television, the Internet and print sources. They come in contact with multiple marketing and advertising messages, especially those for candy, sugary cereals and fast food. They spend most of this time using media while sedentary.

At the same time, health experts are calling for nationwide action to slow the rising rates of overweight and obese children. The most recent research indicates that childhood obesity rates have more than tripled since 1980. Health experts encourage limiting "screen-time" to 2 hours a day. But is there more we can do to limit the negative impact of media on child health?

The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), part of the National Institutes of Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, created a program called Media-Smart Youth. Media-Smart Youth is an initiative for 11-14 year olds, which strives to empower kids to think critically and make thoughtful decisions about nutrition and physical activity.

Media-Smart Youth asks kids (and their parents) to answer these six questions while viewing product advertisements through TV or print media:

- 1. Who is the sponsor or author?**
- 2. Who is the audience?**
- 3. What is the purpose?**
- 4. What is the message?**
- 5. What information is missing?**
- 6. What techniques are used to attract your attention?**

To learn more about media's impact on your kids:

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/msy>

