

A Guide for making healthier choices

SECONDARY STRATEGY # 5 - WATCH HOW YOU WATCH TV

What does television have to do with healthy eating? Think about these points for a moment:

- By the end of high school it is estimated that most young people will have watched over 35,000 commercials on television.
- Of these commercials, it is estimated that approximately 55% are for food.
- About 65% of food commercials are for high-sugar foods (for example, candy, soda pop, high-sugar breakfast cereal and so on); it's a good guess that many of the other food commercials are for fast food restaurants or convenience-type foods.
- What's even more amazing is the estimation that by the end of high school, young people will have watched an average of 15,000 hours of television (that's the same as about 2 years of your life spent in front of the TV) compared to spending only 13,000 hours in the classroom.

There's no doubt about it – that's a lot of TV - and a lot of commercials!

Most commercials are nothing more than an attempt to convince you that you just have to buy a certain food or product – you've just got to have it. Advertisers will often spend millions of dollars and use a variety of techniques to do this:

- Identification: "we're just like you, and we buy this product."
- The Bandwagon: "everyone else buys this product, so why don't you?"
- Fame: "famous people buy this product, so it must be good."
- Snob Value: "only the best people buy this product."
- Limited Offer: "if you don't buy now, you'll lose your chance."
- Repetition: "saying the same things so many times it sounds true."
- Bargain! Free! "you can get something for nothing if you buy this product."
- Hidden Details: "this is a great product. Don't worry about a few little details."

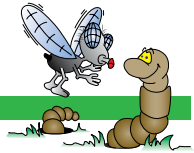
(Source: Heart Smart Family Pack (from Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada) - originally adopted from Catherine Cooper and Karyn Freeman, National Heart Foundation of Australia (1993) p.91 - which credit J. Dalton, Adventures in Thinking, Thomas Nelson Melbourne, 1985)

Look for these messages within the commercials you see. Ask yourself if you really do need this product just because it sounds or looks good on television. Don't get the product just because the advertisement says you should, or because the people in the commercial seem to be having an awesome time.

What's the connection between TV and a healthy lifestyle?

- Watching all of those commercials makes you more likely to buy (or have your parents buy) and eat a product that is low on nutrition.
Remember the commitment you made to eat healthier. Remember how you are trying to focus on creating a foundation of eating healthier foods. Remember to respect and treat your body well by feeding it nutritious, healthy food. Don't lose that self-respect. Don't give in to choosing less healthy food just because of some commercial.
- It is quite likely that seeing all of those food commercials will "trigger" in you the feeling that you need something to eat right there and then, while watching TV. Most often, in this case, the snack you will reach for is your typical convenience or fast food. Many of these foods are low on nutrition but high on "empty calories." You end up reaching for an unhealthy snack to satisfy a craving. If you notice these cravings or wants every time you see a certain commercial, be aware of how that commercial may be conditioning you - almost brainwashing you - to desire a certain product or food. Instead of just automatically reaching for that snack or whatever, stop first and ask yourself if you really are hungry. Don't eat in front of the television. Have your snack in the kitchen or wherever you normally eat a

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regular meal - just not in front of the TV. And, plan your snacks - decide what kind of healthy snack you are going to have ahead of time. Plan in advance to make a healthy choice so that you will be less likely to "give in" to those unhealthy choices.

If you just can't give up TV, the next best thing is to take the advice - "tune in, but don't tune out". When watching TV, don't "turn your brain off." Don't become a TV "zombie" where your eyes glaze over and you stop thinking for yourself. Don't let the TV "think" for you by putting all kinds of ideas into your head, including the ideas that you must have the products you see in commercials. Keep in mind that just about everything (food, restaurants, amusement parks, clothes, people and so on looks like fun or looks better on television – this is called marketing!)

Make a serious attempt to watch television more intelligently. Don't turn on the television just for the sake of turning it on. Think about the programs you see, and only watch the ones you really like.

Respect yourself. Don't let TV advertisers try to talk you in to eating something you don't really want or need.

Choose health - Watch how you watch TV.