



# Junk food marketing to children: A study of parents' perceptions

Produced by Food Active and  
The Children's Food Campaign

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## Food Active

Food Active is a North West healthy weight programme from the Health Equalities Group.

The aim of Food Active is to tackle the social, environmental, economic and legislative factors which influence people's lifestyle choices and behaviours. You can find out more at [www.foodactive.org.uk](http://www.foodactive.org.uk).

## Children's Food Campaign

The Children's Food Campaign is a national organisation championing children's rights, parent power and government action to improve the food environment children grow up in.

They have recently launched The Parents' Jury, an initiative giving a voice to parents on the food available and promoted in their children's schools, in shops, on the high street, and beyond. You can find out more at [www.childrensfood.org.uk](http://www.childrensfood.org.uk).

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## Executive summary

The UK is currently facing a childhood obesity epidemic. Despite the introduction of a Childhood Obesity Plan in 2016, trends continue to show year on year increases in the number of children leaving school obese. Policymakers must urgently address the driving influences of this epidemic, of which Junk Food Marketing (JFM) is a great concern.

There is a significant body of evidence that shows JFM negatively influences children's eating habits, and despite changes to advertising regulations, children are still exposed to a significant amount of JFM on broadcast media, via non-broadcast media and in the wider built environment.

The UK Parliament Health and Social Care Committee have recently put forward recommendations designed to tighten JFM practices, including a 9pm watershed for JFM and banning the use of characters in JFM. However, parents' views on such policies and JFM in general are not widely researched. This study was designed to fill that gap, to collect data from parents in the North West of England and to give an insight into their thoughts on JFM to children.

### KEY FINDINGS

- 85% of parents said junk food marketing encourages their child to ask for the advertised foods and drink
- TV (74%), supermarket promotions (69%) and popular children's TV and characters on packaging (48%) were the three platforms that had most impact on their children's eating habits.
- 64% of parents want a ban on the advertising of unhealthy food and drink on family time TV programmes.
- 72% of parents want children's meals with toys to meet government nutrition standards
- 75% of parents think that food and drink industry do not act responsibly when marketing to children
- Only 37% of parents said the food and drink industry were making changes to help reduce childhood obesity

### Considerations

These findings suggest parents in the North West are concerned about the influence junk food marketing has on their child's eating habits and would support a number of policy measures to tackle this, including a ban on JFM during family time viewing and restricting the use of toys in unhealthy children's meals. These calls are also supported by health charities, medical colleges and the UK Government's Health Select Committee who believe these policy changes will have a positive impact on levels of childhood obesity.

In anticipation of the Childhood Obesity Plan chapter 2 which is due for release over Summer 2018, policymakers should consider these findings to further inform appropriate anti-obesity measures that are welcomed by the public and parents alike.

## Introduction

There is a childhood obesity epidemic in the UK, with one in five children aged 4-5 years and one in three children aged 10-11 years being overweight or obese. The North West of England however experiences levels above the national average at both reception and year 6 age – in Cumbria, as many as 28.2% of children start school overweight or obese and in Manchester, 40.3% of children leave primary school overweight or obese [1].

Despite the introduction of the Childhood Obesity Plan in 2016, trends indicate that the number of children leaving primary school obese continues to increase [2]

Obesity is a chronic disease and it adversely affects the short term and the long term physical and psychological health of children [3] and also often results in a long-lasting negative impact on weight status in adolescence and adulthood [4].

Junk food marketing (JFM), which is the marketing of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS), is a major contributor to the obesogenic environment in the UK. Unsurprisingly, food advertising in the UK is dominated by unhealthy foods [5], with the top spending HFSS brands investing over £143 million on advertising their products each year [6]. As a result, JFM is hard for children to avoid, and children are also often considered a primary target for JFM, but because of their immaturity they are unable to critically assess JFM [7].

A growing body of evidence shows that JFM directly results in children consuming more HFSS foods [7, 8, 9], with obese and overweight children consuming even more HFSS foods after seeing HFSS adverts than normal weight children do [9]. Research has also shown that the diets of children as young as three years old are negatively impacted by watching TV programmes and the adverts around them [10].

The Advertising Standards Authority, the UK's independent advertising regulator and the Committee for Advertising Practice (CAP), has created regulations to restrict JFM to children on both broadcast and non-broadcast media, where children make up 25% or more of the audience online and TV programmes that have a 'particular appeal' to children [11, 12]. However, children still see a significant amount of JFM when watching family TV and via non-broadcast media despite these regulations [13]. In fact, the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) recently reported that 59% of adverts around family programmes would be banned if they were shown on children's TV [13]. The OHA also reported that in the worst-case scenario children saw 9 HFSS advertisements in a 30-minute period [13].

The continued exposure to JFM means that powerful and negative influences on children's food preferences and eating habits remain, and this makes it difficult for children to follow a healthy balanced diet and for their parents to provide a healthy balanced diet for them [14].

Recent recommendations from the UK Parliament Health and Social Care Committee [15] called on the Government to tighten JFM practices, including a 9pm watershed for JFM and banning the use of child-friendly TV, film and cartoon characters. However, it is not widely known what parents think of JFM and associated policies, so this study was designed to collect data from parents in the North West in order to provide a regional perspective on parent's attitudes in relation to JFM and their child, and to contribute to the narrative.

The aim of this study is to further the understanding of parents' perceptions of the influence of JFM on their child's food choices by collecting views from parents in the North West on:

- the impact of JFM on their child's eating habits
- perceived challenges in achieving a healthy diet for their child
- positive and negative influences on their child's eating habits
- policy measures they would support in relation to the food environment

## Methods

### Study design

This was a cross-sectional study, with the research questions based on those used in the Rudd Report [16], and further developed using input from academics, researchers and a pilot study. The two criteria for taking part in the questionnaire were that parents must be living in the North West of England, and have children aged 2-17 years old living at home.

To facilitate recruitment and to allow people to freely express their thoughts we chose to gather data using an online questionnaire. The survey research questions are in Appendix 1. The questions were available in English and answers were requested for only one child in the family. Participants were asked to answer in relation to their child whose name was alphabetically closest to the start of the alphabet.

A small number of surveys were also completed on paper and face to face in BAME communities where English was not their first language. Translators were present to help participants understand the questions and answer options.

### Pilot study

We carried out a pilot study at a local library's 'stay and play' session in August 2017 and five parents completed paper copies of the questionnaire, with support, if needed, from Food Active's researcher. Participants in the pilot study were each given a £5 shopping voucher for taking part.

The pilot study identified an issue with question 16 which was about media and internet devices in children's bedrooms. The issue was that there was no option to indicate 'none'. Updating the question format was considered after the pilot, but no change was ultimately made as it did not fit with the format of the question, and it was also believed that the question would still work in its current format. The responses from the pilot have been included in the study.

### Recruitment

We approached many organisations across the North West, including schools, work places, community groups, faith groups, and parents' groups from late September 2017 to early February 2018, primarily by email, to promote the survey and to encourage them to raise awareness of the survey amongst their networks and social media.

We recruited additional parents from late September 2017 to early February 2018 through snowball sampling, using personal connections and social media.

The survey was available from late September 2017 to early February 2018 on a well-known online survey platform.

## Results

The total sample size for this study was 380, representing parents across different geographical locations in the North West. A full list of the survey questions and answer choices can be found in Appendix 1.

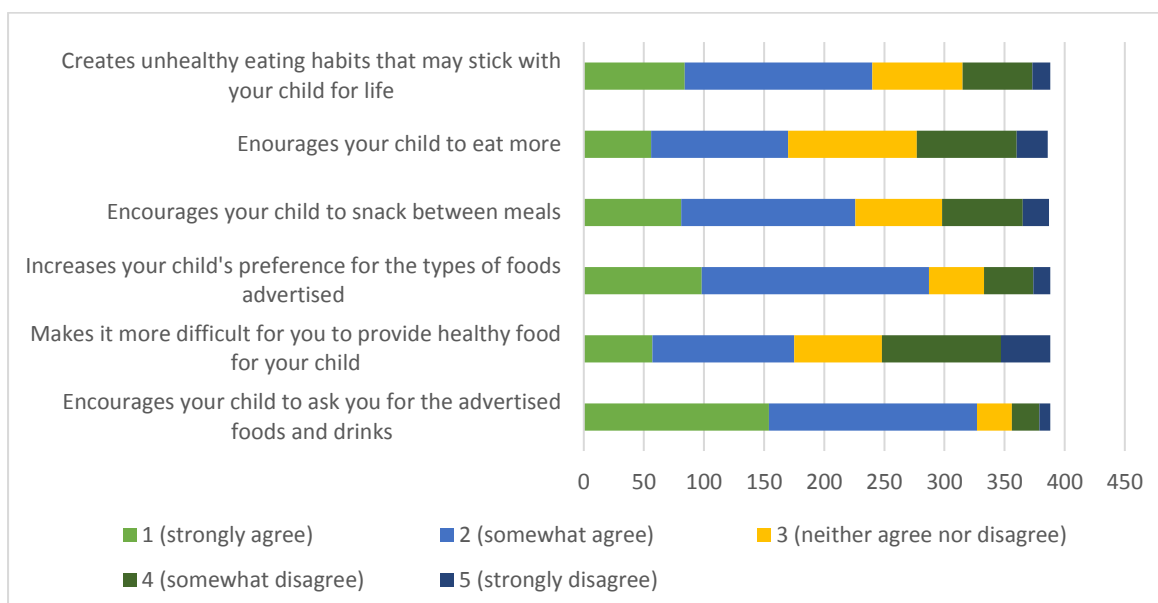
### The impact of JFM on children

Parents were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements regarding the impact JFM has on their child. The three statements parents agreed with the most were:

- 85% of parents agreed that JFM encourages their child to ask for the advertised foods and drinks, of which two fifths (40.5%) strongly agreed.
- 75% of parents agreed that JFM increases their child's preference for the types of food advertised, of which one quarter (25.7%) strongly agreed.
- 63% of parents agreed that JFM creates unhealthy eating habits that may stick with their child for life.

Over half (59%) of parents also agreed that JFM encourages their child to snack between meals. A large number of parents also agreed that JFM makes it more difficult to provide healthy food for their child and encourages their child to eat more (46% and 44% respectively). Full illustration of these responses can be found in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Impact of JFM on children's eating habits*





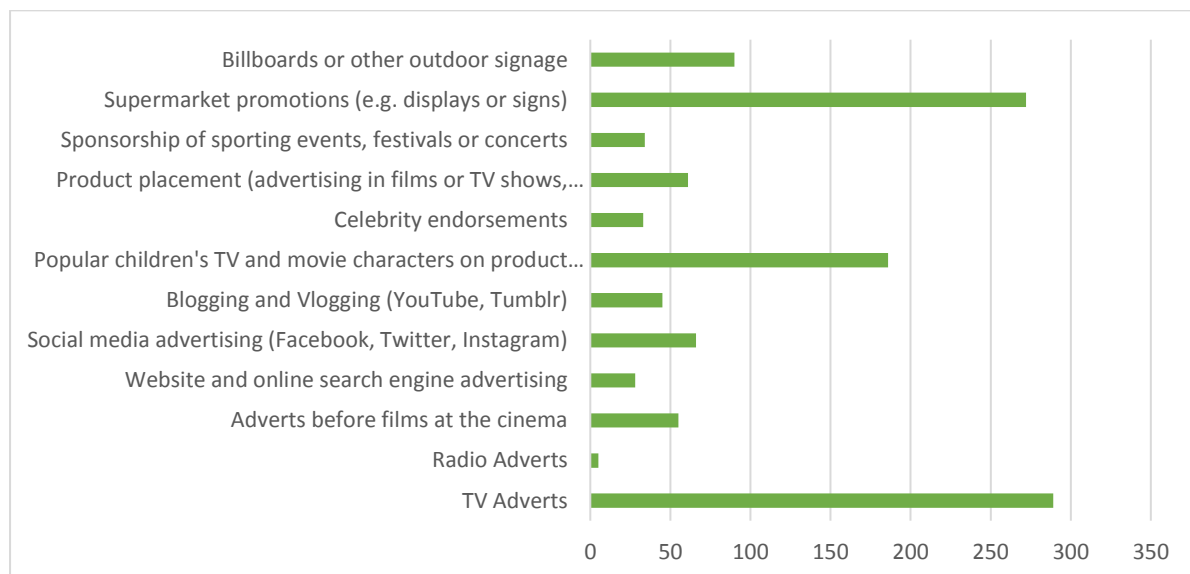
*"My other child is so swayed by the junk food marketing that it causes an argument every meal time."*

### Marketing Techniques and Platforms

When asked about the top three marketing techniques and platforms used for JFM that has the most impact on their children, parents answered television (74%), promotions on unhealthy food (69%) and popular TV and characters on food packaging (48%).

Techniques with the least impact were noted as celebrity endorsements (8.22%) and sponsorship of sporting events, festivals and concerts (8.77%). Full representation of this data can be seen in Figure 2.

*Figure 2: Which marketing platform has the most impact on your child's eating habits*



Parents also raised concerns about other techniques and platforms where JFM impacts on their child's eating habits:

**Checkout and till areas:** *"By tills in shops... Displays, placement in shops, cafes. Low down near the till in child eye level... At the till in shops... at the tills"*

**Children's play areas:** *"Play centres - on display... Play areas - i.e. Trampolining, soft play, football venues, and scooter parks etc. - any kid's venue you attend"*

**Peers:** *"Friends and general availability... junk food is everywhere!"*

*They get influenced by other kids. Grandparents... Peer pressure... Peers... chat amongst friends."*



### Perceived challenges in achieving a healthy diet for their child

The most common challenges the parents reported when trying to provide a healthy diet for their child were the following:

- 51% of parents said there are too many snack and junk foods available
- 47% of parents said it is too easy to buy junk food
- 39% of parents said there are always deals on unhealthy foods

*"More needs to be done to help support parents so that making the right choice is easier when it comes to your child's diet. "*

Less common challenges are:

- Not enough time to sit down for family meals (17% of parents)
- Needing to eat out of the house (15% of parents)
- Not enough time to prepare healthy meals (17% of parents)
- Hard not to give in to my child's requests for unhealthy foods or brands (20% of parents)
- Being a poor role model with their own eating habits (13% of parents)

Additional challenges and themes noted by parents can be seen below.

**Schools:** *"The school brought a crème egg for each child in the school at Easter and buys all the children chocolate at Christmas..."*

*School give pupils treats as rewards and birthdays and are always selling cakes...."*

**Peers:** *"Extended family and childminders feed them junk or sugary food as a treat...."*

*My child wants to eat what her friends eat at school"*

*Friends which have poor eating habits with their children...offering my child unhealthy food whilst at their house"*

**Availability:** *"It's easier to have stocks of long life unhealthy food than easy grab healthy alternatives..."*

*Availability of sugary drinks, sweets and rubbish snacks. They are everywhere!..."*

*When out in the car it is not easy to find healthy food to grab and go, resorting to the nearest drive thru"*

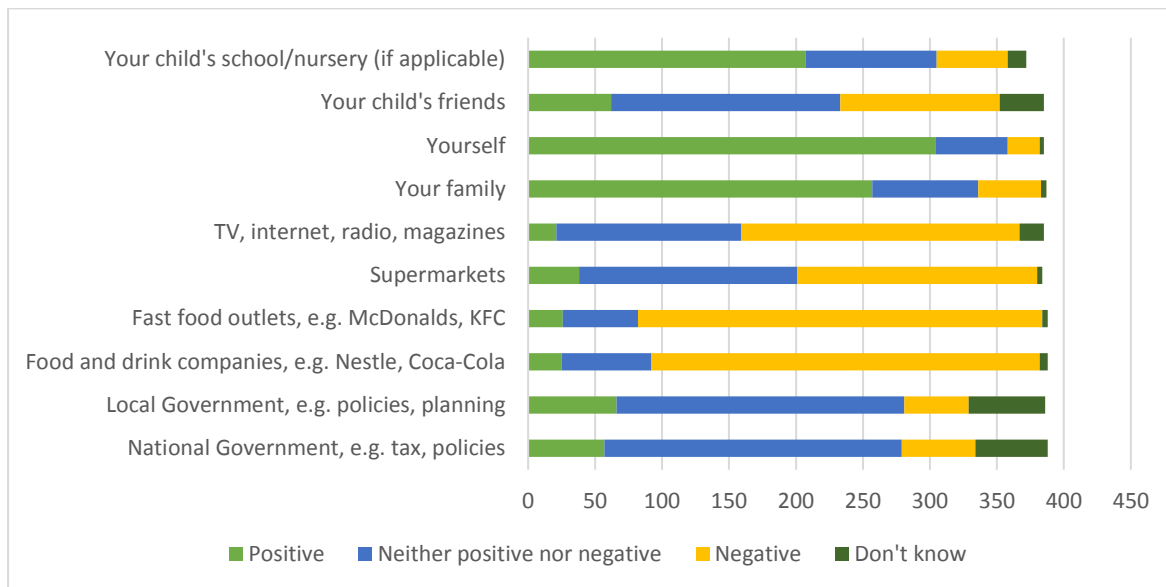
### Positive and negative influences on their child's eating habits

The large majority of parents thought parents (77%) and family (66%) were a positive influence on their child's eating habits. Only 52% reported schools and nurseries as a positive influence.

In terms of those who portray a negative influence on children's eating habits, parents reported fast food outlets (79%), the food and drink industry (77%) and TV, internet, radio,

magazines etc. (54%). Just under a third of parents also thought their children's friends were a poor influence on their eating habits (31%). Parents were indifferent as to whether the national and local government was a positive or negative influence on children's eating habits.

Figure 3: Positive and negative influences on children's eating habits



*"We constantly speak with kids about healthy eating, do not eat fast food, but sometimes they are upset as other kids at school are laughing about their eating habits."*

### Responsibility for the increase in obesity rates in children in the UK

Parents were asked to rank those who they believe are responsible for the increase in obesity rates in children in the UK.

Parents ultimately thought they themselves were primarily responsible (72%) for their children's eating habits, leading to rising levels of obesity in children, however this was closely followed by food and drink companies (68%). Blame is also apportioned to TV and internet, supermarkets and friends and relatives (53%, 50% and 50% respectively). This highlights the fact that parents think it is a joint and shared responsibility. Full results from this question can be seen in Appendix 2.

*"Although food companies have a responsibility to market healthy food more than junk food, it is parental responsibility to ensure their children eat healthier food at home and schools to ensure healthier food is only available."*

### Parents' views on food companies

Parents were asked if they agreed with a number of statements about food companies in relation to the obesity crisis and food environment. The responses were as follows;

- 76% of parents think that some food companies do not act responsibly when they advertise to children
- 45% think that some make it more difficult for parents to raise healthy children
- 45% think that some food companies provide nutritional information that helps parents make healthy choices
- 43% think that some have improved the nutritional quality of products marketed to children over the past three years
- 37% think that some are making changes to help reduce childhood obesity.

*"Food companies' priority is profit, plain and simple. They are not interested in our nutrition unless demand is there from us."*

### Policy measures parents would support

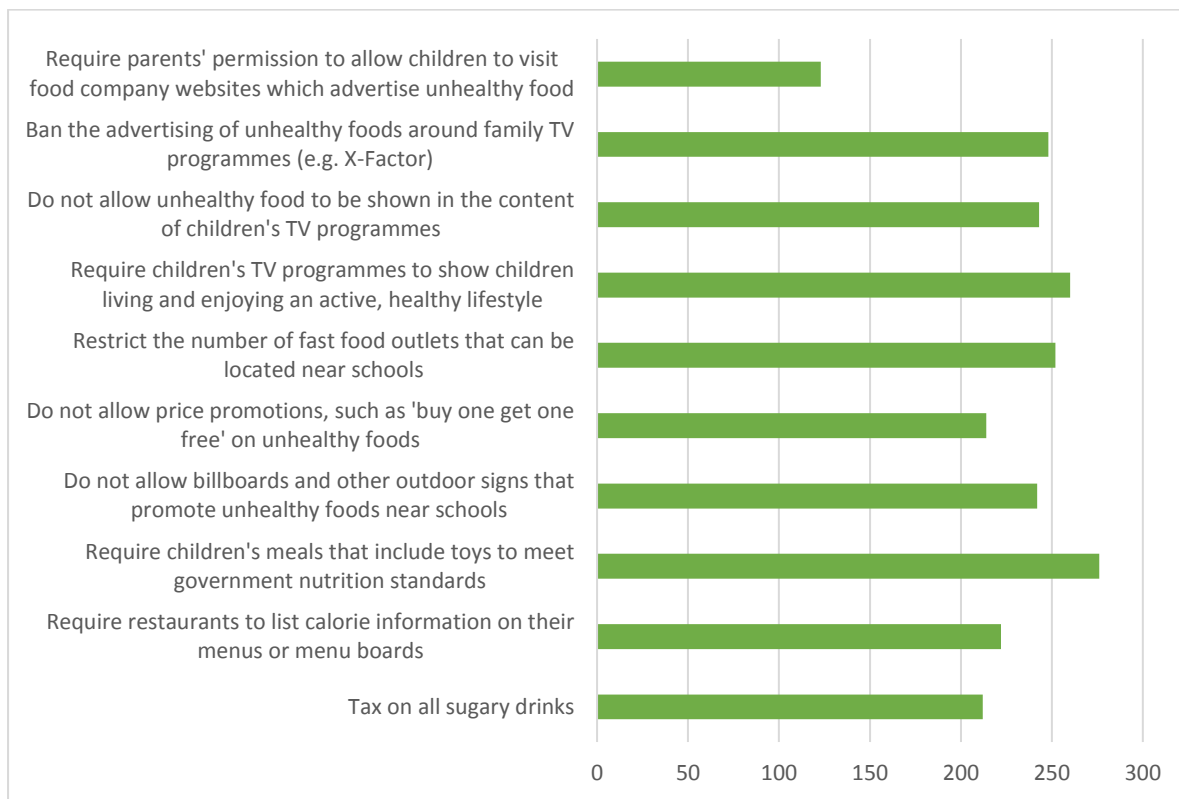
Parents were presented with 10 different policy measures, aimed at tackling unhealthy food environments and asked to indicate which measures they would support. Over half of parents were supportive of nine actions, whilst the three policy measures that received the most support were:

- Ensuring children's meals with toys meet government nutrition standards – such as the nutrient profiling model to determine healthy and less healthy food and drink (72%)
- Children's TV to show children enjoying an active healthy lifestyle (68%)
- Restricting the number of fast food outlets around schools (65%)
- A ban on the advertising of unhealthy food and drink during family viewing TV programmes (64%).

Other policy measures that over half of parents would support included calorie information on café and restaurant menus (57%), ban on price promotions on unhealthy food (56%) and a tax on all sugary drinks (55%). A full illustration of these findings can be viewed in Figure 4.

*"Regulation needs to be brought in to reduce exposure to children. However, not just television we need to consider social media and channels such as YouTube as this is less controlled and adverts are even more random."*

Figure 4: Policies parent would support



### Qualitative questions

We also gave parents the opportunity to add any further comments about how they feel about JFM to children and where they think it is most prevalent.

A number of these quotes have been presented in the findings, however the full collection of comments can be found in Appendix 6.

### Descriptive characteristics

#### Parent demographics

- Parents from all North West counties were represented, with Merseyside (36.7%) being most represented and Cumbria being least represented (1.6%).
- Most parents were female (90.5%)
- All marital statuses were represented, with most parents reporting married status (65.7%)
- All ages were represented, and the most represented ages being 25-34 years (28.9%), 35-44 years (46.5%), and 45-54 years (21.1%).
- Parents represented a range of household income levels, with most parents stating a household income of under £30,000 (36%), or between £30-60,000 (34%).
- A range of education levels were represented with most holding an undergraduate degree (33%) or high school/A-levels (25.7%) as their highest level of education.

- All surveyed ethnicities were represented, the majority of parents were white/white British (88.1%).

The parent demographic data can be seen in more detail in Appendix 2.

### Child demographics

- Children in each of the age ranges, 2-5 years, 6-11 years, and 12-17 years were all represented.
- Boys and girls were almost equally represented, 48% and 52% respectively.
- Most parents reported their child as being the same weight as other children the same age (63%), 23% of parents said their child was thinner, and 14% said their child was heavier than children the same age.

The child demographic data can be seen in more detail in Appendix 2.

### Children's eating habits

To give an idea of children's current eating habits parents were asked to answer a question about their child's current eating habits.

- 85% of parents reported their child consumes sweets and chocolates weekly, 15% of which stating, 'every day'.
- 78% of children eat cakes and biscuits at least once a week
- 74% of children eat cakes and biscuits weekly, of which almost 15% reported daily consumption.
- 62% eat desserts on a weekly basis
- 47% eat breakfast cereals at least once a week, with over half (32%) claiming this to be more than once per week.
- Just 28% reported consumption of sugary drinks on a weekly basis, 49.18% reporting their child never consumes these products.
- One quarter (25%) of children consume fast food at least once per week.
- 23% of children consume takeaways at least once per week.

Further details about the frequency of consuming HFSS food consumption can be found in Appendix 5. More details about the food shops visited, parental responsibility levels and internet access and media devices in their child's bedroom are in Appendix 6.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that parents recognise that they are responsible for providing a healthy balanced diet for their child, but they are clearly frustrated at the impact JFM is having on their child's eating habits and the availability of unhealthy food in their day to day lives.

JFM also appears to be disempowering parents and undermining their confidence in relation to providing a healthy balanced diet for their children.

Parents see the use of toys and characters as deliberate tactics by junk food brands targeting their children by making emotional connections with their products and brands in general, resulting in pester power and children's associating unhealthy products with fun, play, treats, rewards and special occasions. The school environment was also frequently suggested as an environment that associates rewards with unhealthy foods, such as sweets.

Parents expressed conflicts with their children in situations where they have refused to purchase unhealthy food and drinks or situations where their child is teased by their peers at school for bringing a healthier lunchbox. The marketing and availability of foods high in fat, sugar and salt has led to the normalisation of consuming these foods on a regular basis, whereby many children view these foods as the norm or even 'cool' – contrary to public health guidance which discourages them entirely.

The findings from this research show that parents feel they are unable to manage or control the amount of JFM their children see and hear and the amount of junk food their children are around which complicates the role for parents.

According to the results, there is a high level of support from parents for a range of policy changes that would improve the food environment, which would then make it easier for them to provide a healthy balanced diet for their children. This has positive implications for gaining public support for stronger measures that are required to effectively tackle the rising tide of childhood obesity.

There are two limitations with this study to consider. Firstly, it is worth noting that the sample of parents in this study represent only one region of the UK. Although there was some variation in the level of household income and level of education, the sample was mostly white/white British and female, and therefore the sample is therefore not representative of the UK population. The second limitation is that the parents who took part in the study may be self-selecting responders and have a greater than average interest in health and nutrition and potential areas of policy change.

In spite of these limitations the findings from this research directly contribute to the evidence base for tackling JFM and childhood obesity in the UK and provide a useful insight into parent's options on this matter.

## Recommendations and Further Research

In light of these findings, we recommend the five following actions to help improve the food environment to tackle obesity and to benefit the evidence base to advocate for appropriate policy change:

1. A 9pm watershed on junk food marketing to children across all broadcast media. Attention should also be paid to online streaming services and catch up TV, which are not currently covered by broadcast. This will ensure children are no longer exposed to unhealthy food and drink marketing through family viewing time, as with current restrictions.

2. Further research into how different types of online marketing (vloggers, social media interaction, online games) influence children's eating habits, as the evidence base is not as robust in comparison to the evidence linking television marketing to children's eating patterns. This research would help to strengthen policy calls to improve current non-broadcast marketing restrictions to children and young people.
3. Restrict the number of promotions on unhealthy food and drinks across the whole retail environment (including non-food retail). Promotions located at the checkout area are of particular concern, and the Government should look to restrict this on a legislative basis. We know that parents see this as an issue in supermarkets, and research shows that half of all promotions of food are relating to products high in fat, sugar and salt [17]. However, many newsagents and clothing stores are now selling these products in store and more research is required to help understand the availability of unhealthy food and drink products across different retail sectors.
4. Further research is required to understand the influence toys in children meals have on their eating habits and preferences, given the concern raised by parents in the study. This will add to the evidence base to help strengthen any policy calls in relation.
5. Restrict the use of child-friendly film, TV and other cartoon characters being used to encourage children to demand and consume products high in fat, sugar and salt. This was a clear concern raised by parents in this study as an effective way of marketing to children.
6. We welcome the news of a second edition of the Childhood Obesity Plan. However, we need more than just a standalone strategy that leaves the responsibility solely at the door of public health. We need to take a 'whole systems approach', including decision making and policies that align efforts from a wide range of departments, including transport, media, education, housing and business, to address the underlying causes of obesity.



## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the academics and researchers who helped in the design stages of the survey and those who reviewed the final report.

We would like to thank the parent and toddler group at Toxteth Library in Liverpool who allowed us to pilot our survey with them. This was really useful in helping finalise the design of the survey.

We would like to thank all participants who took the survey. Your participation is valuable and will contribute to the wider narrative on creating a healthy food environment for children in the U.K.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Survey questions

Question number	Question	Answer Options
1	Do you have children between the ages of 2 and 17 living at home?	yes no
2	If you have more than one child living at home in your care, for this survey we would like you to think about the child (between 2-17 years) whose first name comes first in the alphabet (i.e. if you have two children in your care between 2-17 years, one name Anna and the other named Ben, please think about Anna when completing this survey).  How old is your child?	no pre-defined options
3	What is your child's gender?	male female prefer not to say
4	How much responsibility do you have in making decisions about food and drink choices for your household? (please select one)	I am primarily responsible for all the decisions regarding food and beverage choices in my household  I share responsibility for the decisions regarding food and beverage choices in my household  I have little or no responsibility in the decisions regarding food and beverage choices in my household
5	Where do you live?	I live in the North West of England (Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cheshire)  I do not live in the North West of England
6	Please select the top three places where you think 'Junk Food Marketing' has the most impact on your child's eating habits. (junk food marketing refers to the marketing of unhealthy foods which are high in fat, sugar and salt, e.g. fast-food, sweets and chocolates, crisps or other sugary and salty snacks or drinks)	TV Adverts  Radio Adverts  Adverts before films at the cinema  Website and online search engine advertising  Social media advertising (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)  Blogging and Vlogging (YouTube, Tumblr)  Popular children's TV and movie characters on product packages

		<p>Celebrity endorsements</p> <p>Product placement (advertising in films or TV shows, music videos or video games)</p> <p>Sponsorship of sporting events, festivals or concerts</p> <p>Supermarket promotions (e.g. displays or signs)</p> <p>Billboards or other outdoor signage</p> <p>Other, please specify</p>
7	How confident are you that you know how much Junk Food Marketing your child sees or hears on a daily basis?	<p>not confident at all</p> <p>not very confident</p> <p>neutral</p> <p>fairly confident</p> <p>very confident</p>
8	<p>Using the scale below, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about junk food marketing to your child. Junk Food Marketing...</p> <p>.. encourages your child to ask you for the advertised foods and drinks</p> <p>.. makes it more difficult for you to provide healthy food for your child</p> <p>.. increases your child's preference for the types of foods advertised</p> <p>.. encourages your child to snack between meals</p> <p>.. encourages your child to eat more</p> <p>.. creates unhealthy eating habits that may stick with your child for life</p>	<p>strongly agree</p> <p>somewhat agree</p> <p>neither agree nor disagree</p> <p>somewhat disagree</p> <p>strongly disagree</p>
9	<p>Please indicate whether you think the following have a positive or negative influence on your child's eating habits.</p> <p>National Government, e.g. tax, policies</p> <p>Local Government, e.g. policies, planning</p> <p>Food and drink companies, e.g. Nestle, Coca-Cola</p> <p>Fast food outlets, e.g. McDonalds, KFC</p>	<p>positive</p> <p>neither positive nor negative</p> <p>negative</p> <p>don't know</p>

	<p>Supermarkets</p> <p>TV, internet, radio, magazines</p> <p>Your family</p> <p>Yourself</p> <p>Your child's friends</p> <p>Your child's school/nursery (if applicable)</p> <p>Other, please specify</p>	
10	<p>Please rank in order who you think is to blame for the increase in obesity rates in children in the UK</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>Schools</p> <p>National Government</p> <p>Local Government</p> <p>Food and drink companies</p> <p>TV and internet</p> <p>Supermarkets</p> <p>Friends/ relatives</p>	<p>1 = most responsibility</p> <p>8 = least responsibility</p>
11	<p>Below is a list of actions that are either currently being taken or could be taken to promote a healthier food environment for children. Which actions would you support?</p> <p>Tax on all sugary drinks</p> <p>Require restaurants to list calorie information on their menus or menu boards</p> <p>Require children's meals that include toys to meet government nutrition standards</p> <p>Do not allow billboards and other outdoor signs that promote unhealthy foods near schools</p> <p>Do not allow price promotions, such as 'buy one get one free' on unhealthy foods</p> <p>Restrict the number of fast food outlets that can be located near schools</p> <p>Require children's TV programmes to show children living and enjoying an active, healthy lifestyle</p>	<p>Please tick all that apply</p>

	<p>Do not allow unhealthy food to be shown in the content of children's TV programmes</p> <p>Ban the advertising of unhealthy foods around family TV programmes (e.g. X-Factor)</p> <p>Require parents' permission to allow children to visit food company websites which advertise unhealthy food</p>	
12	<p>We all have challenges in providing a healthy diet to our children. Can you please select those which apply to you.</p> <p>We do not have enough time to sit down for family meals</p> <p>We often need to eat out of the house</p> <p>There is too much unhealthy food advertising</p> <p>I don't have enough time to prepare healthy meals</p> <p>Healthy food is too expensive</p> <p>There are always good deals on unhealthy foods</p> <p>It is too easy to buy fast food</p> <p>There are too many snack foods and junk foods available</p> <p>I find it hard not to give in to my child's requests for unhealthy foods or brands</p> <p>I am a poor role model with my own eating habits</p> <p>Other (please specify)</p>	Please tick all that apply
13	<p>How often has your child consumed the following foods and drink in the past week?</p> <p>Sugary drinks (e.g. Coke, Fanta, Red Bull)</p> <p>Sugary breakfast cereals (e.g. Coco Pops, Frosties)</p> <p>Savoury snacks (e.g. crisps sausage rolls, scotch eggs)</p> <p>Confectionery (e.g. sweets, chocolate)</p> <p>Baked goods (e.g. cakes, pastries, biscuits)</p> <p>Desserts (e.g. ice cream, cheesecake)</p> <p>Fast food (e.g. Mcdonalds, KFC)</p> <p>Takeaways (e.g. Pizza, Chinese, Indian)</p>	<p>every day</p> <p>more than once per week</p> <p>once per week</p> <p>less than once per week</p> <p>never</p> <p>do not know</p>
14	<p>Which of the following statements do you agree with?</p>	Please tick all that apply



	<p>Some food companies make it more difficult for parents to raise healthy children</p> <p>Some food companies market their most nutritious products to children</p> <p>Some food companies do not act responsibly when they advertise to children</p> <p>Some food companies provide nutritional information that helps parents make healthy choices</p> <p>Some food companies have improved the nutritional quality of products marketed to children over the past three years</p> <p>Some food companies are making changes to help reduce childhood obesity</p>	
15	<p>How would you describe your child's weight?</p> <p>I feel like he/she is thinner than most children the same age</p> <p>I feel like he/she is the same weight as most children the same age</p> <p>I feel like he/she is somewhat heavier than most children the same age</p> <p>I feel like he/she is much heavier than most children the same age</p>	Please select one
16	<p>Does your child have the following in their bedroom?</p> <p>TV</p> <p>A video console (e.g. X-box, Playstation)</p> <p>A computer</p> <p>A smartphone</p> <p>Internet access other than through a computer (such as smartphone or tablet)</p>	Please tick all that apply
17	<p>Please add any further comments that you have re junk food marketing to children.</p>	No pre-defined answers
18	<p>What is your current marital status?</p> <p>Single</p> <p>Single, living with another as a couple</p> <p>Married</p> <p>Divorced</p> <p>Separated</p> <p>Widowed</p> <p>Prefer not to answer</p>	Please select one
19	<p>Which race/ethnicity best describes you?</p>	Please select one

	<p>White/White British Black/Black British Asian/Asian British Mixed race Rather not say</p>	
20	<p>Please state the highest level of education you have completed.</p> <p>GCSE High School Graduate/A levels/BTEC National Diploma Undergraduate Degree Master's Degree Doctorate No formal qualifications</p>	Please select one
21	<p>What is your gender?</p> <p>Female Male Prefer not to say</p>	Please select one
22	<p>What is your age?</p> <p>18 to 24 25 to 34 35 to 44 45 to 54 55 to 64 65 to 74 75 or older</p>	Please select one
23	<p>Please enter the start of your postcode (e.g. L39 or WA11)</p>	
24	<p>What is your approximate average household income? Please select one.</p>	<p>£0-£9,999 £10,000-£14,999 £15,000-£19,999 £20,000-£29,000 £30,000-£39,999 £40,000-£49,999 £50,000-£59,999 £60,000-£69,999 £70,000-£99,999 £100,000 and over Prefer not to say</p>
25	<p>Where do you carry out the majority of your food shopping?</p>	<p>Supermarket (Tesco, Sainsburys, ASDA, Morrisons)</p> <p>Premium supermarket (Waitrose, M&amp;S)</p> <p>Discounter supermarket (Aldi, Lidl)</p> <p>Budget supermarket (Iceland, Farmfoods)</p> <p>Local convenience store (Londis, Premier Stores)</p>

		Local independent stores (greengrocer, butcher, fishmonger)
		Food market (Farmers Markets) Independent delivery service (meal plans, vegetable boxes)
		other, please specify

## Appendix 2 - Responsibility for the increase in obesity rates in children in the UK

Responsibility	% of parents ranking 1st	% of parents ranking 2nd	% of parents ranking 3rd	% of parents ranking 4th	sum of % for top 4 rankings
Parents	56	8	4	4	72
Food/drink companies	19	20	18	11	68
TV and internet	7	10	18	18	53
Supermarkets	3	11	18	18	50
Friends/relatives	2	24	12	12	50

## Appendix 3 – Qualitative responses

Please add any further comments you have about junk food marketing to children.

*Toys do not help the choices children can make e.g. McDonald's. My child might eat something else but would choose a happy meal for the toy*

*Junk food is too readily available and used too easily by parents. It is disappointing to have to be perceived as the 'mean' parent in having to say no to my children's requests to be eating the same as their friends or as encouraged by family. Portion sizes of treats have increased and people don't think twice about treating children to sweets at 10am following hobbies. My children have treats (not daily and not excessive), although it us about balance and rules are more relaxed on holiday. My children (5, 6 + 8) love foods and snack and I try hard to help them understand the nutritional value of food (without obsessing) and as parents our job is to educate our children, but too many parents don't understand themselves.*

*The availability of sugary junk food and drinks in play centres, cafes and parks is awful. My young children are continually having to battle the temptation to eat crap, it should have to be kept in a cabinet not visible like cigarettes!!*

*I think junk food advertising is far less of a problem than the declining culture of parents and children eating home cooked meals together, and the wider availability of ready meals etc.*

*Children seem to do less exercise and less playing outside which is also a contributing factor to obesity alongside junk food marketing.*

*I feel like such a huge area of major supermarkets is given over to unhealthy foods. Like the same square footage just for crisps as there is for vegetables. As a family we don't watch much TV or absorb much advertising, but everyone has to go shop for food - when you're in the shop and there's just so much junk food around you it's easy to see this as a normal part of your diet.*

*I'm unhappy that some companies are responding by putting sweeteners in when they reduce sugar in products, rather than just reducing the sweetness by removing some sugar. I'm unhappy that they try to market these "reduced sugar"/"zero sugar" drinks to children as healthy rather than admitting that healthy drinks for children are water and milk*

*My 7 year is old is a big 7 year old not weight wise tho more tallness. He is a fussy eater which makes meals harder but he is healthy.*

*Patents have to take responsibility at least for smaller children that can't go out and buy their own food*

*We spent some time in Denmark and were surprised how the sugar tax changed our buying choices. A pack of 5 donut peaches was under £1 but a small tube of smarties/ pack of haribo over. Sugary fromage frais (unbranded) prohibitively expensive but yogurt cheap. We had lovely fruit platters with natural yogurt and a spoon of honey dip. The children were not marketed at for the weeks we were there. We did have one holiday McDonalds but ate healthier for it being parent choice no pepa pig type marketing drawing the children towards certain products.*

*I find foods geared towards children than are not healthy very strange, for example breakfast cereals. They are very recognisable and because most people, I imagine, have the same thing for breakfast every day it becomes a routine. When my son first discovered coco pops I let him finish the packet and then didn't buy more but on our next supermarket visit they were on promotion on the end of an aisle, he spotted them and was thrilled we had 'found them' He couldn't understand why I wasn't going to buy them and it was very difficult not to.*

*From the point of view of a parent of a toddler, one of the biggest issues for us at the moment is having children's film and TV characters on product packaging as my child will spot them as we are going round the supermarket and want us to buy them. ....think Peppa Pig, Frozen etc*

*Parents/caresrs/family need to take most of the responsibility of what goes in to their kids mouths and also school still serving squash and saying it is juice! Serving of sweet biscuits every day in after school clubs. The film 'That Sugar Film' should be shown to all school food providers and parents regarding the hidden sugars in foods. The category junk food is interpreted differently by different households and no products such as flavoured yoghurts which are really high in sugar should have children's character endorsement on the packaging..there is also still a long way to go in some schools wrt healthy foods. Artificial sweetners and hydrogenated fats should be banned in childrens foods not used as a replacement for sugar and butter - everything in moderation and education of parents is key*

*Products are made to look appealing for example Disney characters on sugary yoghurts. Brightly colored packaging. Toys in children's meals. McDonalds do not cook children's chips separately so*

*are laden with salt. Little on offer apart from nuggets fish fingers etc when dining out. Some restaurants feel children should just eat bog standard freezer foods with no real nutritional contents.*

*Food companies' priority is profit, plain and simple. They are not interested in our nutrition unless demand is there from us. Sweets, crisps and fizzy sugary drinks are all readily on hand in our environment for snacking at any time. These are very high in calories which take much effort to burn up. You can't outrun a bad diet. We need more readily available delicious snacks and drinks that are not full of sugar and fat. We need to desaturate our environment from all the rubbish. Our towns need to support walking and cycling and stop focusing on cars and roads! Government needs to step up on this!*

*I think the government should ban local fast food chains such as take aways from posting flyers, including in newspapers wether loose or printed in it.*

*Make healthy food cheap and unhealthy more expensive*

*My little girl has a treat once or twice a week as part of an incentive for spellings tests/homework etc. Every major supermarket has junk food alongside their healthy items, it's down to the parents what goes in the basket. Advertising is always going to happen, however if a parent educated the child on health and healthy eating then the child will be aware as to what is a treat and how regular they should be allowed one. The challenge ultimately lies with the parent.*

*My main concern is the food they are given in school, the menu this week includes chips 3 times and there is a biscuit, cake or ice-cream every day for dessert.*

*The key is parental responsibility & that Junk food is ok to eat but in moderation, it's nice to have a treat as long as it is a treat & does not constitute as being the norm :-)*

*Encouraging positives like satisfying meals, good health, good sleeps and the fun of physical activity must accompany a discussion of avoiding the bad things.*

*At the least the school should forbid crisps chocolate and sugary drinks in packed lunches. I think a national campaign against snacking between meals would dramatically improve nutrition, obesity rates and dental health. My daughter is slight it overweight due to early puberty, but we eat very healthily - I did 2 free online nutrition courses on Futurelearn.com to learn to feed my daughter and the children I childmind properly. We only drink milk and water, allow no snacking between meals, have dessert only if it's a birthday, and full up on raw carrots, cucumber, apples immediately after main meals if still hungry. We never eat cereals. I think snacking is popular culture since the late 80s and as most snack foods are grossly unhealthy, this is a major impact on obesity. Most parents I know don't even offer veg to their children! They make "children's food" that they wouldn't dream of eating themselves, and eat adult food later in the evening, separately. You need to look at the common use in some estates of "hungry baby milk" formula to keep small babies asleep and less bother to parents. If I could determine policy I would bring high fat and high sugar foods under the same retail policy as*

*alcohol and cigarettes i.e. only sold to those aged 18+. I also think that baby foods made in the style of crisps should not be available for sale in UK as they promote snacking habits in babies!*

*I think that the whole obesity crisis... and a rise in diabetes... is fuelled around a culture of wrong nutritional advice: we've all been told to eat low fat, high carb... but research now shows that a diet higher in fat and lower in carbohydrates is what is healthy. Healthy food is often sold as pseudo healthy... low fat, lots of chemicals and high in carbs. Also, 'healthy' children's products are often full of sweeteners, instead of teaching children to eat less sweets foods they are only adding to children's addiction to sweet.*

*As my child grows he is more and more aware of branding and packaging. Walk down the crisp and biscuit aisle of the super market there is so much packaging in bright colours targeted at kids. Also, we try to avoid high fat potato product like waffles etc and coated chicken etc but all of this is aimed at kids getting hooked on it. Once they know about it it's difficult to stop them asking for it. Better labelling with the traffic lights taking up more space would help. Health warnings like we have in cigarettes should be used that take up half the packaging and properly tell people how bad some of this food is for kids.*

*More healthy choices need advertising.*

*My daughter and her friend's love playing "McDonalds" at school and previously at nursery. The free toy is a massive incentive for children to want to go there and some of her friends seems to visit quite regularly.*

*A big problem is 'hidden' sugar, in food in general and in particular in products marketed as 'healthy' or 'fruit' e.g. yoghurts/fruit drinks/cereal products etc. that people are unaware of if they do not read the labels.*

*I hate toys with food, like happy meals etc.*

*Its habits that they are brought with and raised, children need to have good examples in parents that eat healthy encourage exercise and living well, let's not blame others, choice is important it's all about balance*

*Marketing tends to focus on the senses as opposed to the ingredients / process of manufacturing x*

*Cut prices on healthy food.*

*Toys, adverts, cartoon characters etc. are all used to entice children...often these are on unhealthy foods.*



*It needs to be as restricted as tobacco advertising, we are really strict with our children's food choices and make sure they exercise making it fun. We have educated our children on the food we eat, and illnesses associated with a bad diet. I think that parents need to be educated more on food content and also how to make nutritious meals on a low budget. Foods that are generally bad are also very cheap, need to make it more expensive. We don't watch TV but my children will say oh that food was on grandma's TV etc. .*

*Unfortunately junk food has become the staple diet for many families. We had, before we became parents, travel around the world due to work and had been very fortunate to experience world foods and we have successfully introduced those habits in our child, to try everything more than once and learn the nutritional values of food and learn that companies that sell junk food need to make profits and those profits are achieved by reducing the nutritional qualities of what they sell. Fortunately we have succeeded at this even though it was hard, especially when 'school' doesn't make any positive effort in the food they supply during dinners and the education that children need about the importance of food. We always prepared the school lunch for our child to avoid her falling into the junk food trap that school submit to so many children in this country.*

*I feel that sugary foods are the problem. I try to encourage a higher fat diet for him, but he is still under weight.*

*Although food companies have a responsibility to market healthy food more than junk food, it is parental responsibility to ensure their children eat healthier food at home and schools to ensure healthier food is only available. Junk food can be eaten in small quantities otherwise it becomes a forbidden fruit. My three children eat healthy 99% of the time, however I do allow them occasional treats as well.*

*Children absorb so much information that even subtle advertising is too much sometimes. I think there should be a straightforward ban on advertising unhealthy food and drinks on kid's channels and between prime time family shows.*

*Fundamentally I believe that parents are responsible to giving into their children. Adverts are a reminder of what's available to children. Habits can be changed and parents should be role models and eat healthy, nutritious foods so their children can copy.*

*It's not about making junk food more expensive it's about making healthier non processed food cheaper.*

*I'm sick of saying "you can't eat pictures!". Junk food is a temptation to busy parents rather than children. It's very hard to choose between cooking fresh food for them and going out and doing stuff with them outside :- ( constant balance and compromise*

*It makes it too much of a quick fix to stop hunger.*



*More needs to be done to help support parents so that making the right choice is easier when it comes to your child's diet.*

*Advertising creates a frenzy around a product that the kids then want to buy i.e. Oreo thins! So when going round supermarkets they zone into these things, and what do you know they are on offer, so parents think why not it is cheap and will keep them quiet. Also clever Mr Oreo has put them in handy 2 packs so they are ideal for packed lunches.....arghhhhh! One of my greatest issues is supermarkets that have sweets, drinks, crisps etc. by the checkout, so when you are trying to put your shopping through you have the kids nagging at you, trying to reach over, putting things in the trolley etc. As a good parent you say 'no' which then causes a tantrum or argument, you are mortified and start apologising to everyone stood watching whilst still trying to put a weeks' worth of shopping through! Why don't they put fruit there!?!?! We need a whole societal approach to healthier choices, which goes from planning permission of fast food outlets, to advertising, to actual making healthier choices easier and more attractive to kids and parents. It is also a cultural thing that we need to get parents to see that apples are as cheap as the Oreos, and healthier meals are cheap and easy, if you know how...that's another story! If the kids won't eat them there is the challenge, but that is where school can come in having taster sessions, healthy school meals, cooking etc. We need to make eating our 5 a day something that is as cool as Oreos! Also physical activity - where has free swimming gone, where is there access to sport without it being paid for, how can we encourage kids to get off their Ipad and get outside? Why don't give permission for things like skate and scooter parks - local planning!? Make walking and biking the easier option, not dangerous one! We need real long term commitment and investment in our children, families, schools and communities and not tokenistic 'Change for life' stuff that only middle class families take notice of! Rant over!*

*There will always be advertising on junk food. I have always let them have treats occasionally but not on a regular basis. I do think there should be less advertising, and offers on junk food.*

*The toys that come with the junk food are luring children to making unhealthy food choices*

*I think that it is the hidden sugars in food that are the most dangerous for children. I also think that excessive exposure to advertising is harmful to children in all contexts, including toys.*

*It is ultimately up to parents to decide whether to buy a product or not. Marketing obviously has some influence but it is up to the parents to guide children towards making healthy food/life choices which includes occasional treats/junk food.*

*My children eat fairly healthily and in moderation.*

*Children should not have to see ads for unhealthy food and drink anywhere.*

*Get characters and brands off cereal packets.*

*Poverty plays a more than significant part in this. If you have barely any money, your choice is extremely limited unless you have cooking skills and facilities. You can only eat what's cheap, processed & what's barely described as food given there are so many damaging additives*

*All these bans on advertising etc. may help but ultimately it is the parent's responsibility. They say yes or no to what the child eats. Helping parents make better choices at the supermarket i.e. making healthy foods more affordable, child friendly marketing of healthy foods, healthy snack food will all help. Am concerned that reducing sugar for the big companies mean replacing it with sugar alternatives, such as artificial sweeteners - although this will reduce calorie intake, help prevent tooth decay - it does not help prevent a sweet tooth I would prefer that sugar reduction is sugar reduction not replace sugar with artificial sweeteners It could be argued it is not solving the obesity problem but potentially making it worse...*

*Junk food is more readily available in secondary schools*

*Early access always around paying area i.e.: tills.*

*Junk food marketing to children is not so effective if parents speak with them about its negative effect.*

*There is one thing that's helping everything's getting smaller packages for same price*

*We need petitions to go against this kind of marketing*

*I feel the price of better healthier foods is way too expensive, too expensive to consider putting on my child's daily menu. We're not able to make right choices, due to cost of nutritional foods and drinks.*

*Just make packaging plain for products with certain content (similar to cigarettes). Could always add blocked artery images to remind parents of dangers. Parents should take more responsibility*

*Just out-law it! But also teach them how to cook proper meals at home and at school not just cup cakes!*

*My other child is so swayed by the junk food marketing that it causes an argument every meal time.*

*The marketing of junk food is abominable. Parents give in too easily. My children would rather choose a home cooked meal - cooking lessons would be far easier to provide than a change in habits.*

*My kids watch stuff on you tube - I have no idea how much junk food marketing they see there*

*Parents and teachers are the only barriers. But nowadays the parents are as bad; I see numerous kids in prams with packets of crisps in their hand. It's a cultural issue in the UK/US.*

*I feel that a fairer representation of food and drink that's available is needed in marketing. It's fine for children to want certain "treat" things but by not marketing the healthy everyday options in the right way and highlighting the offers, it takes away that other option which I'm sure would be appealing if only it was better marketed.*

*All such advertising should stop.*

*Toys and cartoon characters are one of the main reasons why my child requests unhealthy foods. The McDonald's Happy Meal is marketing genius. Changing the toy weekly makes a child who isn't usually too bothered by McDs want to visit more frequently when a particular theme appeals. Happy Meals should come with water as standard and meet minimum nutritional standards. YouTubers are an issue, my son doesn't watch any TV but does watch particular YouTube channels frequently. YouTube ads are less of a problem than the YouTubers themselves. Grandparents who want to ply children with treats are also a problem.*

*Need to be running more healthy eating sessions learn to cook on a budget how to make meals that last and which you can freeze etc.*

*I think more education is needed alongside clear labelling particularly sugar content. Showing how many spoonful's in a particular item would be the best way.*

*At the end of the day I still feel it's ultimately the parent's responsibility! They can set good examples, they can refuse / agree to limit junk food.*

*Sugar should be taxed on sweets and sweet companies*

*A lot of junk food is with the promise of a toy. More outdoor activities and adverts of snacks providing energy to do fun things is needed.*

*Junk food is made to look more attractive than the healthy food*

*Schools should only provide healthy food. At the moment it's white bread and limited soggy veg. Not appealing. Not filling so kids want snacks after school. Also ice cream van parks at school gates - not helpful.*

*Regulation needs to be brought in to reduce exposure to children. However, not just television we need to consider social media and channels such as YouTube as this is less controlled and adverts are even more random*

## Appendix 4 – Parent and child demographics

Parent demographics	
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>county</b>
1.6	Cumbria
11.9	Lancashire
22	Cheshire
24.9	Greater Manchester
36.7	Merseyside
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>gender</b>
90.5	female
8.9	male
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>marital status</b>
65.7	married
16.2	single but living as a couple
10.3	single
3	divorced
2.7	separated
1.6	did not declare marital status
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>age (years)</b>
1.6	under 25
28.9	25-34
46.5	35-44
21.1	45-54
1.4	over 54
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>average household income</b>
36	< £30,000
34	£30,000 to £60,000
19	> £60,000
12	did not disclose their household income
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>highest level of education</b>
3.8	doctorate
18.1	master's degree
33	undergraduate degree
25.7	high school/A-levels/BTEC National Diploma
15.1	GCSEs
2.7	no formal qualifications
1.6	% did not provide education information
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>ethnicity</b>
88.1	white/white British
4.1	Asian/Asian British
2.4	mixed race
2.4	black/black British
3	did not describe their ethnicity

Child demographics	
% of children	age (years)
32.4	2-5
38.4	6-11
26.3	12-17
1.6	17
% of children	gender
52	female
48	male
% of children	weight relative to other children the same age
23	thinner
63	same weight
11	somewhat heavier
3	much heavier

**Appendix 5 – Children's consumption of HFSS foods, every day and more than once a week, as reported by parents**

Children's consumption of HFSS foods, every day and more than once a week, as reported by parents		
% of children	foods eaten	frequency
16%	sweets and chocolate	every day
47%	sweets and chocolate	more than once a week
8%	cakes and biscuits	every day
45%	cakes and biscuits	more than once a week
15%	savoury snacks	every day
38%	savoury snacks	more than once a week
5%	desserts	every day
31%	desserts	more than once a week
12%	sugary breakfast cereals	every day
20%	sugary breakfast cereals	more than once a week
2%	sugary drinks	every day
13%	sugary drinks	more than once a week
0.3%	fast food	every day
3%	fast food	more than once a week
0.3%	takeaways	every day
3%	takeaways	more than once a week

Appendix 6 – Shops visited, parental responsibility, media devices child's bedroom

Shops visited, parental responsibility, internet access & media devices child's bedroom	
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>majority of food shop done at</b>
57%	supermarket
37%	discount supermarket
3%	budget supermarkets
2%	local independent stores
1%	premium supermarkets
0.3%	food markets
0.3%	independent delivery services
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>responsibility level for decisions on food &amp; drink</b>
60%	primarily responsible
40%	shared responsibility
<b>% of parents</b>	<b>devices/internet access in their child's bedroom</b>
32%	internet access (other than through a computer)
32%	TV
31%	smartphone
20%	video console
13%	computer

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June 2018

Food Active is a programme of work commissioned by the Directors of Public Health in the North West and delivered by Health Equalities Group.

(Registered charity Heart of Mersey, 1110067)

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