

**Michele Polacsek: The Impact of Digital Marketing on Children’s Unhealthy Eating Habits  
“The Academic Minute”  
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**Narrator:**

On University of New England Week — Marketing certain products to kids can have negative effects. I'm Dr. Lynn Pascarella, president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and today on “The Academic Minute,” Michele Polacsek, professor of public health, outlines why.

**Michele Polacsek:**

Digital marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children and adolescents on electronic devices such as computers, tablets, or phones has been shown to undermine healthy eating.

Expanded use of electronic devices and remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to increased rates of childhood obesity, greatly impacted student learning, and exacerbated preexisting racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities. The United States Department of Agriculture provides little guidance on how to address digital food marketing, and federal and state policy protections for children are inadequate.

My colleagues and I recently conducted a study to highlight areas where state and local education authorities can intervene to reduce digital food marketing through their own policies. We highlight four areas for local or state policy intervention and provide model policy language for each area:

First, because increased exposure to food marketing increases unhealthy food intake in children, the study recommends filtering for inappropriate food and beverage content through the school network. Second, because children have the fundamental right to access information free from economic exploitation, schools would benefit from adopting approved lists of digital instructional materials that exclude unhealthy food marketing.

Third, because electronic device use during mealtimes fosters poor nutritional habits, restricting personal device use during the lunch period can support healthy eating behaviors. And finally, because the use of social media increases exposure to powerful digital marketing, schools should not require students or parents to use commercial social media for access to school-related information.

As schools continue using educational technology, policy interventions to limit digital food marketing in schools and on school-issued devices are needed.

**Narrator**

That was Michele Polacsek of the University of New England. You can find this, other segments, and more information about the professors at [academicminute.org](http://academicminute.org).

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