

Happy New year! As from the first working day of 2026 (5th January) the UK has banned 'Junk food adverts' on TV before 21:00h. 'Junk food' for this purpose includes products considered to be the biggest drivers of childhood obesity including soft drinks, chocolates, sweets, pizzas and ice creams. Yum, yum says my tum! So, will this ban actually make a difference? The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) says it is committed to helping people eat healthily. The ban also covers some breakfast cereals and porridges, sweetened bread products and main meals and sandwiches. This comes at a time when ultra processed foods (UPFs) are also in the public eye with lawsuits being filed against many of the major companies in the US. At the moment, my money is on the major companies losing the case.

Presently, the big brands try to push that they engage with the healthy agenda stating that the food and drink industry has long been making efforts to reduce salt, sugar and saturated fats from many foods, whilst increasing fibre protein and micronutrients. In fact, in an article published in November 2025 in [The Lancet](#), leading nutrition bodies reject the 'ultra-processed food' concept stating that it lacks scientific consensus and is imprecise, confusing and risks undermining existing public health efforts.

These comments from the food and drink industry risk undermining serious research and are similar to the arguments put forward previously by the tobacco industry to protect itself when the dangers of tobacco were first being taken seriously. In fact, many of these tobacco companies have put money into the food industry!

So far, the villain of the story seems to be the food and drink industry, but are junk food and UPFs the only things that we need to consider for change? How about the individual that chooses to eat the food? Do they have any accountability? You only have to go onto YouTube for a minute to find many videos showing 'mother of 3 preparing breakfast' as she throws pre-packaged cheese slices onto a plastic plate followed by oven baked waffles, jam and peanut butter, orange juice in a carton and 'real' vegetables made into some sort of reconstituted straw shape, to see what many consider worth boasting about on social media. How can anyone think that this should be the image they project of themselves, to show that they are a good mother, for surely they do not wish to promote their own bad parenting?

Having done some work just this summer for school aged children who were entitled to free lunches (and therefore come from lower income families), I was truly upset at how many of the children only ate chicken nuggets and chips. In discussion with these parents, many of whom did not work and had time to prepare food, I tried to find out why this was by putting forward a case for a nutritious meal, to educate them on what else they could offer to their children. My argument went like this: 'You can buy a whole chicken which can feed a family of 4-5 people for approximately £5 in a supermarket, (therefore £1 per portion for a family of 5), with some potatoes and vegetables at about 50 pence per head, this only comes to £1.50 per head for a nutritious meal'. The reply?

‘Why go to all that bother if I can get 25 chicken nuggets for £3 plus some chips £2.50 and just stick it in the oven’. So, 5 chicken nuggets and some chips for £1.10 per head. A saving of 40 pence with little real nutritional value. Even though the cost was roughly the same, even though they had time to prepare the food, this was the reasoned decision that they had come to. In reality, there are many meals that can be made at home that would work out even cheaper, but the desire was just not there. Poor education, laziness or a combination? I’m still not sure.

So do we continue to blame the food industry for making this ‘junk’ food? Or do we blame the people who go for the easy option? Or maybe we blame the ethos of the country that seems to have lost the ability to educate young people in how to prepare and make food in a way that is both economical and healthy? Perhaps, instead of banning adverts for ‘junk’ food before 21:00h, we could look at promoting healthy foods and how to prepare them, in adverts before the 21:00h watershed to encourage healthy choices and to improve the health of the nation.

Food for thought, in this final paragraph. When visiting these schools and youth clubs to discuss the foods available to the children, I had an interesting conversation with a teacher who had taken a group of young athletes to Spain for an international competition which took place in a Spanish school where the food at lunchtime was provided. He told me how difficult it was for the British kids to eat the lunchtime meals, which consisted of complete meals of fish or meat, served with vegetable and potatoes or rice and required some effort to cut and eat, as the children only wanted chicken nuggets and chips, or similar. However, the other European children all sat and happily ate the full meals served to them, with no complaints. Does this come from better education or social conditioning? Food industry changes, extra taxes, banning adverts, education or all of these, which do you think will serve us the best?