

NUTRITION MESSAGES IN A POPULAR TEENAGE MAGAZINE

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Adolescence is a time when attitudes and habits develop towards eating and drinking. Since the mass media help to create social norms, they are recognized as being very powerful socializing agents, and the types of nutrition messages contained in particular in television have been extensively studied. Far less attention has been paid to the nutrition messages contained in magazines which are popular with young people who cite them as an important source of nutrition information (Thomsen et al. 1988). Recent research indicates that there are strong gender differences in adolescents' use of magazines. While males tend to read a greater range of magazines, females prefer those which concentrate on pop culture and fashion (Sachs et al. 1991). *Dolly* is a leading teenage magazine of the latter type.

This study examined the quantity and quality of nutrition messages found in 12 issues of *Dolly*. The table shows that nutrition information was found in seven articles, 21 advertisements and 46 small segments and incidental references. These covered 61.1 pages in total or 3.6% of the available space; a small amount compared with the number of nutrition images in television advertising and programming popular with young women (Morton 1991).

Source of nutrition message	Total no. of sources	Total no. of pages of nutrition messages	% of magazine containing nutrition messages	Coding of nutrition messages		
				+	-	N
Articles	7	18	1.1	6	1	
Advertisements	21	32.5	1.9	20	1	
Small segments & incidental nutrition refs	46	10.6	0.6	25	15	6
TOTAL	74	61.1	3.6	31	37	7

The messages were coded as positive, negative or neutral according to the accuracy of the information and their support for good nutritional practices. Although overall there were slightly more negative than positive messages, six out of seven articles (a total of 18 pages) were judged to carry a positive message. Topics covered included breakfasts, body image, vegetarianism and alcohol usage. On the other hand, 20 of the 21 advertisements were judged to be negative. Most were for one brand of soft drink. However, there were none for alcoholic drinks. A combination of positive and negative messages were found as small paragraphs or incidental references in letters, news items, articles and advertisements. The more frequent positive messages gave accurate information on topics such as calcium, hidden sugars, alcohol and healthy breakfasts. Some of the negative references ridiculed healthy foods, emphasised eating for comfort and glorified the binge eating of chocolate and fast food. There were also many gratuitous mentions of branded soft drinks and fast food outlets in newsy snippets and articles about what popular people were doing around the world.

In summary, the food advertisements in *Dolly* magazine were far less frequent than in the case on television, but they were even more inclined to be for a narrow range of foods, with none at all for staples. The snippets and incidental references to eating and drinking contained positive and negative messages with the former predominating. The articles were mostly well-written and gave accurate and useful nutrition information. Overall, the messages were conflicting and could cause confusion. Furthermore, the negative nutrition messages might well be reinforced by the many pages devoted to fashion and beauty and the dominant impression that a very thin body is a essential ingredient of success. The results of this study demonstrate that information on the types of nutrition messages being directed at young people in some print media could be useful when planning nutrition education programs.

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