

UK Government Advertising Ban Targets Porridge

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UK Government Advertising Ban Targets Sugary Foods, Sparking Debate

New regulations set to take effect in October 2025 will restrict advertisements for food and drinks deemed "less healthy" in a bid to address rising childhood obesity rates in the UK. The legislation will apply to TV ads aired before 9 p.m. and paid online advertising.

The ban, announced by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson in 2021 and delayed due to economic concerns, includes a wide range of products such as sugary breakfast cereals, sweetened yoghurts, crumpets, scones, and certain types of porridge. Foods classified as "less healthy" will be determined through a scoring system that evaluates sugar, fat, and protein content. Products without added sugar, salt, or fat, such as plain porridge oats or unsweetened yoghurt, will not be affected.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting described the policy as a step toward shifting healthcare focus from treatment to prevention. The government projects the ban will prevent thousands of obesity cases annually and reduce UK children's calorie intake by 7.2 billion calories.

NHS data highlights the urgency of the issue, showing that 9.2% of children in reception classes are obese, and over 23% experience tooth decay by age five due to high sugar consumption.

Critics, however, question the ban's scope and effectiveness. Paul Bristow, a former Conservative MP, expressed concern over the inclusion of everyday staples like porridge and crumpets. "The government needs to trust people to make their own decisions," he said.

Some business owners echoed this sentiment. Prasanna Callaghan, who runs Crumpets café near Buckingham Palace, called the policy "bonkers," arguing that categorizing crumpets as junk food could harm small businesses.

On the other hand, proponents, including cook and restaurateur Thomasina Miers, welcomed the move as necessary but urged the government to take further steps. Miers pointed to the economic burden of diet-related diseases, citing research estimating these conditions cost the UK £268 billion annually.

The legislation has also sparked debate among parents. While some, like Maria McCracken from Kent, emphasize the importance of teaching children healthy eating habits at home, others question whether banning advertisements will effectively change behavior.

The government maintains that evidence supports a link between food advertising and increased calorie consumption in children. As implementation approaches, the ban is set to reshape the advertising landscape and reignite discussions about public health and personal responsibility.

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Pressat Wire

E. [support\[\]@pressat.co.uk](mailto:support[]@pressat.co.uk)

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