

# Kicking Out Junk Food

## Parents' Jury Report Findings

### Methods

In April 2021, Food Active and Children's Food Campaign teamed up to create an online survey to gather views from UK parents, carers and guardians on the marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport. After several weeks of development and internal testing, the draft survey was piloted with 5 parents to test the usability and functionality.

In June, we launched the survey on SurveyMonkey to mark the launch of the EURO 2020 tournament.

The survey was composed of 22 questions, a selection of multiple choice, checkboxes and open-ended questions, with completion taking roughly 10 minutes. The survey was open to any parent, carer or guardian living in the UK with children under 18 years of age. If parents either did not have a UK address or children over 18, they were excluded from the survey.

We also offered some incentives for completion; a number of Love2Shop vouchers as part of a prize draw and participants were offered the opportunity to opt in or out. All responses were anonymised and treated confidentially, with the data being managed by Food Active.

For clarity, we outlined the following definitions at the start of the survey:

- Less healthy food and drink: food and drink high in fat, sugar, and salt in line with the Government's definition, using the Nutrient Profiling Model. This could include foods such as sweet snacks (sweets, chocolate, biscuits, and cakes), savoury snacks (crisps and salted nuts), takeaway foods (chips, fried chicken, burgers, and pizzas) and sugary drinks (cola, lemonade, milkshakes, and sports/energy drinks).
- Marketing through sport: this could include shirt sponsorship, pitch side banners, TV adverts, promotions with players among other activities.
- Food delivery platforms: referring to the likes of Just Eat, UberEats and Deliveroo.
- Sport: referring to *all* types of sports including televised sport and grassroots/amateur sport.

The survey was open from Friday 11<sup>th</sup> June until Monday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Food Active disseminated the survey via its local authority network, social media following and mailing list. The Children's Food Campaign distributed the survey across its vast network of members, its Parents' Jury panel of 600 parents, social media channels and via the Sustain

local food partnership network. Partners were provided with a brief communications toolkit with suggested tweets and graphics to use.

This is an appendix to the Kicking Out Less healthy Food report and aims to provide a more detailed insight into the data collected through the Parents' Jury survey.

## Limitations

There are some important limitations within this research to take into consideration when interpreting the results. Whilst efforts were made to disseminate the survey across a wide range of audiences, the sample is not representative of the UK population due to the sample size and type of respondents. Readers should therefore be cautious about generalizing these results at a population level.

There is an element of selection bias to consider when interpreting these results, due to the type of followers Food Active and Children's Food Campaign currently have, who may already be sensitised to this issue.

## Key findings

### Which sports are associated with advertising food and drink?

***"We notice adverts near places where we do sports."***

Parent response to survey, 2021

We asked parents to recall any sports where they have seen less healthy food and drink advertisement and sponsorship deals.

- 9 in 10 parents (97%) report seeing less healthy food advertised via football
- One third of parents (32%) reported seeing less healthy food advertising during the Summer Olympics.
- One in four parents (25%) mentioned seeing less healthy food sponsorship during motor sports events.

Parents also mentioned seeing less healthy food advertising in their local community sports centres and venues.

## The growing role of online delivery platforms

- Over one third of parents (37%) told us they'd seen food delivery platforms associate themselves with sport. Three in four parents (75%) named Just Eat, and just under half (48%) mentioned Deliveroo. Uber Eats and Domino's pizza were also cited.

We showed parents an example of a Just Eat BT Sport advert featuring ex-England player Peter Crouch.

***"Food delivery platforms don't only deliver less healthy food so I don't have a problem them having visibility at a sporting event, as long as they don't feature the delivery of less healthy/fast food in their advertisement."***

*Parent response, 2021*

- 3 in 4 parents (75%) said they were concerned by food delivery platforms associating themselves with sports, and half (50%) said they were very concerned.

## How concerned are parents?

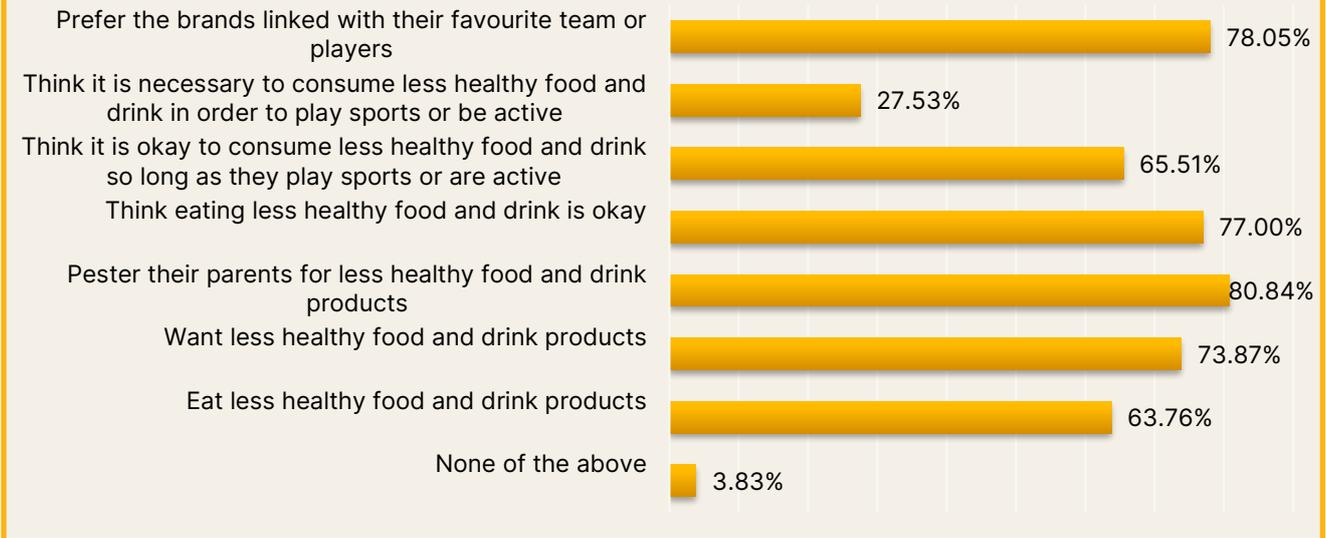
Using photos as prompts, we asked parents how concerned they were about the marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport through a range of different platforms of communication: TV, online and social media and on food and drink packaging.

- Nearly 8 in 10 parents (79%) were concerned about marketing of less healthy food and drink alongside sports on TV, and nearly 6 in 10 (59%) were very concerned.
- Over 8 in 10 parents (83%) were concerned about similar marketing on social media, with 6 in 10 (60%) saying they are very concerned.
- Over 8 in 10 parents (81%) were concerned about similar marketing via on-pack promotions, of whom 6 in 10 (60%) were very concerned.

## Influencing and impact on children

We asked parents to think about how this type of marketing may impact on children's perspectives or behaviours. We asked parents to think generally about all children, not just their own children. 297 parents answered this question, with the results presented in Figure 1.

**Thinking NOT JUST ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN, BUT CHILDREN MORE GENERALLY, do you think the marketing of LESS HEALTHY food and drink in sport makes it MORE LIKELY for children to...  
(Please tick all that apply)**



**Figure 1:** Parents responses when asked whether they thought the marketing of less healthy food and drink in sport made it more likely to influence a selection of children's behaviours and attitudes.

The most popular answer was '*pester their parents for less healthy food and drink*' (80.8%), followed by '*prefer the brands linked with their favourite team or player*' (78.1%) and '*think it is okay to eat less healthy food and drink*' (77%).

A number of parents shared their in-depth thoughts on the impact of linking sport with less healthy food and drink, and the impact this may have on children and their food preferences - and their requests to parents to purchase these foods.

## Parents' views on effects on their children

*"I feel that linking into sports events does encourage children to want to buy items which poses more than one challenge for parents. Not only are the products less healthy, but they are also too readily available and at times can be expensive. The gimmicks such as adapting the products name to link in with events and putting competitions on really does engage children. My 9-year-old son asked me to buy him a large packet of Doritos based on the fact that there was a competition that he had no chance of ever winning. I tried to explain about how companies just want you to buy their products and they will use any tactic to sell their product, but it's quite hard for children to understand that concept, and all it brings is disappointment and an ever-increasing waistline."*

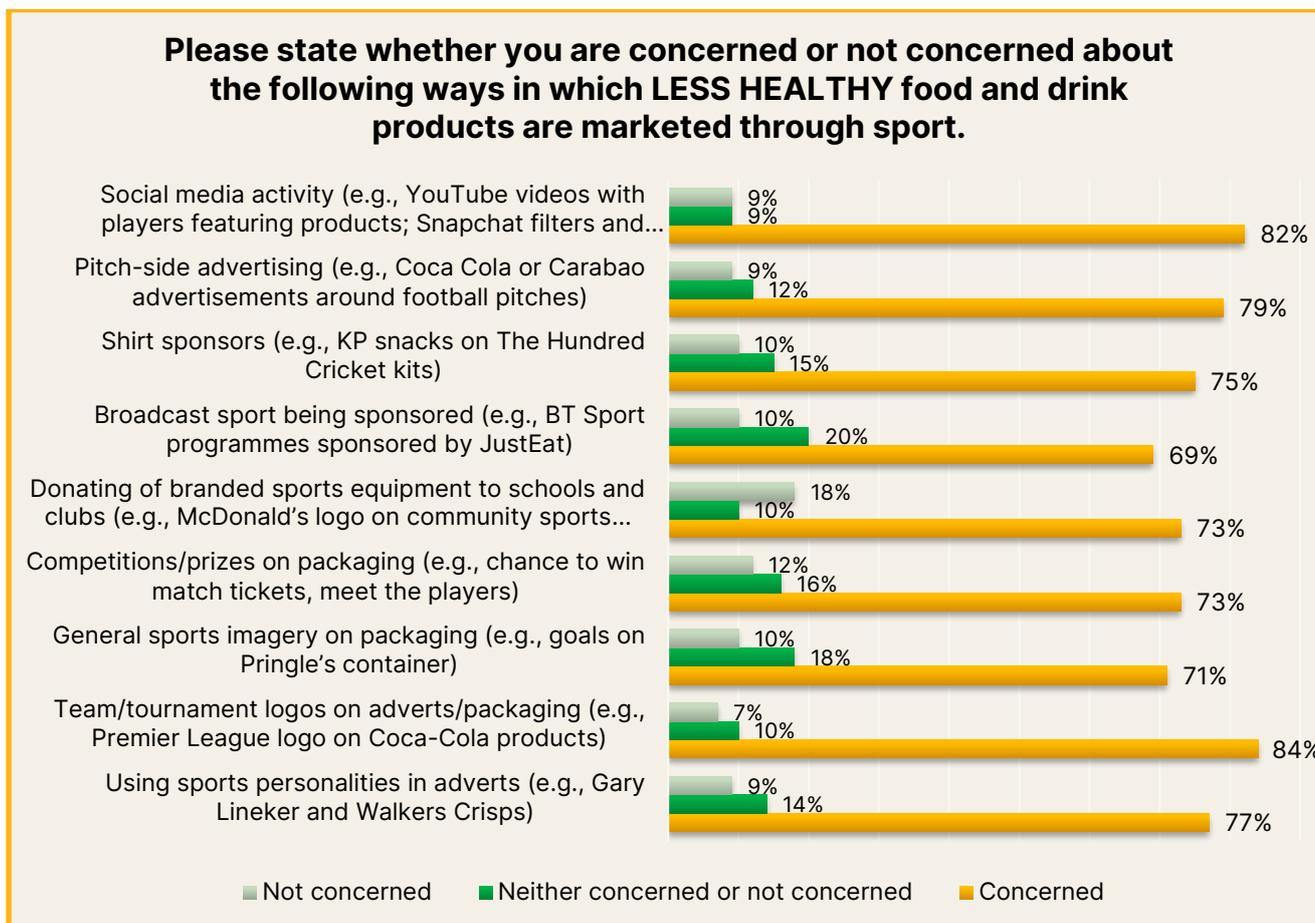
***"The new One Hundred cricket has different crisp brands for each team. It feels like the crisps are competing not the players. But as soon as my children see such brands and think they are good they then want them."***

*"My son is 6 and is becoming very aware of footballers on packaging in supermarkets. These are usually end of aisle promotions and usually chocolate or fizzy drinks. He doesn't necessarily want to buy them yet but he always stops and looks. He's made the link between Coca-Cola and football as he's seen so many bus shelter ads. The two shouldn't be linked."*

***"I would be more concerned if I had brought my child up to be surrounded by sport, influenced by the adverts and gave into pester power."***

## Which marketing tactics are of most concern?

We asked parents to report their level of concern about a range of different types of methods of marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport.



*Figure 2: Parents' responses when asked their level of concern about a range of different marketing tactics currently used by food and drink brands.*

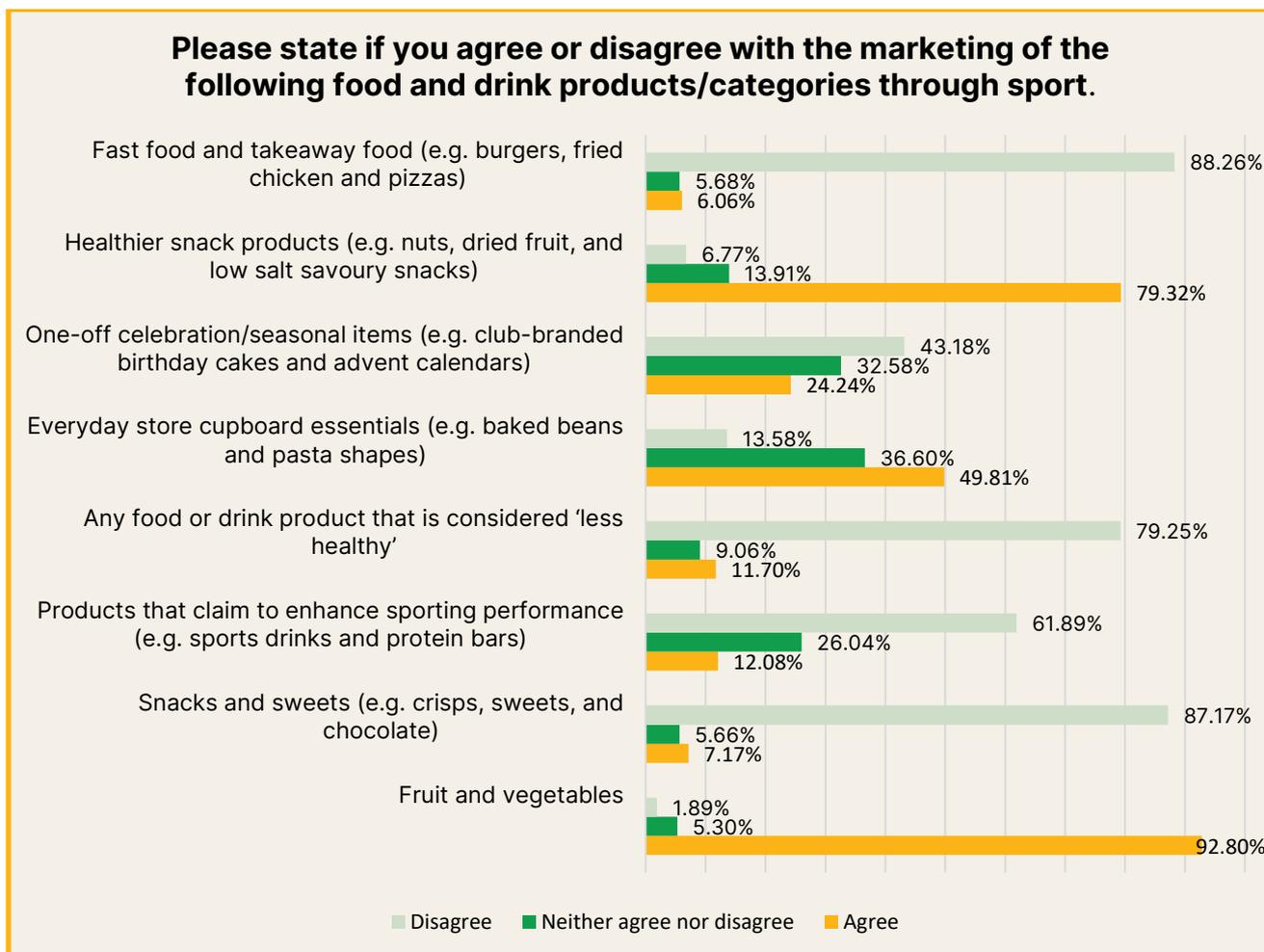
Of the options presented, as can be seen in Figure 2, the top three methods of marketing in sport that were of greatest concern were: team/tournament logos on adverts/packages (83.5%); social media activity including influencer posts (81.7%); and pitch side advertising (79.4%).

The options of least concern to parents were broadcast sport being sponsored (69.4% were concerned) and general sports imagery on food packaging (71.2% were concerned).

## Which food and drink categories are of concern?

We asked parents to evaluate which food and drink products/categories they felt it was appropriate to be involved in marketing activities through sport. Responses hugely varied across the food and drink categories presented, with some parents rating some categories inappropriate, but others appropriate. For example, more than 9 in 10 (92%) of parents we spoke to thought it was okay for fruit and vegetables to be involved in marketing activities

through sport. Other categories that parents accepted included 'healthier snack products' (79.3%) and 'everyday store cupboard essentials' (49.8%), as seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 3:** Parents' responses when asked which food and drink categories they think it is appropriate to be involved in marketing activities via sport.

On the other hand, categories that parents felt it was inappropriate to be involved in marketing through sport included 'fast food and takeaway food' (88.2%); 'snacks and sweets' (87.1%) and 'any food or drink product that is considered 'less healthy' (79.2%).

Parents were divided in relation to one-off celebration or seasonal items (ie. club-branded birthday cakes or advent calendars).

## Key qualitative themes

As part of the online survey, there were multiple opportunities for participants to share their thoughts and experiences in a number of open-ended questions.

These questions provided a rich amount of data, which we have attempted to categorise into a series of themes to represent the response from parents and supplemented with a number of quotes.

## Mixed messaging from sportspeople

One of the most frequent themes that came out of this research was the concern that marketing of less healthy food and drink through sports clubs, tournaments and personalities creates a huge amount of confusion about the link between sport and a healthy diet. Parents reported lots of concerns that associating sport with less healthy food creates mixed messaging for children, that it is okay to consume less healthy food and drink as long as you are active and/or that sporting athletes consume these types of foods - when the reality is they don't. Instead, some suggested if they do have to advertise food and drink, it should be the healthy kind and not the kind that undermines healthy eating guidance.

### Parents' views on mixed messages

***"Using sport to promote less healthy food brands sends a confusing message to children."***

*"Children are being given mixed messages - home and school saying they should make healthy choices for healthy bodies, and sports personalities promoting the opposite."*

***"When children see their favourite sports icons eating or drinking less healthy food or drink it legitimises it for them, confusing and overriding any positive messaging they receive at school or home around making sure they have a balanced, healthy diet."***

*"Sports is promoting an active and healthy lifestyle inspiring young children and then putting on adverts promoting less healthy food and drink contradicts the sport gives children the impression that if you are active you can eat less healthy food. Giving them mixed messages."*

***"It's a contradiction that children of a certain age won't understand. A healthy lifestyle is a combination of healthy eating and exercise, not just one. It's depressing that people at the top of their game are greedy for advertising revenue that undermines their message as a sportsperson who can be a role model to kids."***

*"No, it's a complete contradiction in terms, especially when you think top sportspeople have nutritionists who carefully manage their diets."*

## The role that role models play with children

Another strong theme that came out of the survey was the discussion around famous sports personalities using their platform for good, and not for promoting less healthy choices to their loving fans. Parents described how their children often idolise certain players or athletes, to the point where they would imitate their behaviours - including what food and drink products they appear to be eating. It was suggested that they have the potential to positively influence children by promoting healthier options instead.

### Parents' views on role models

***"Sports stars are role models to children and influence their behaviour. Our sporting heroes shouldn't be pushing less healthy food to kids."***

*"Endorsement by players, seen as cool and role models, also encourages consumption. It makes it harder for parents to present healthy eating as attractive and important."*

***"[They] See the sports people as role models and think it's 'cool' to eat/drink those products."***

*"Clubs and individual sports stars could play a crucial part as role models by sharing messages about how food is a key factor in any athlete's lifestyle instead of accepting lucrative deals to promote less healthy foods."*

***"Professional sports people should behave as role models. They haven't achieved their successes through eating the less healthy food they promote. I think it's totally unacceptable for big food companies to get away with this. It sends completely the wrong message to children and young people."***

## Money, money, money

Lots of parents were frustrated about sports clubs and personalities taking money from less healthy food brands when many are already very affluent. On the contrary, there were some who raised some of the issues around funding of smaller and grassroots sports and how this revenue may be essential for the survival of these clubs. It was also suggested that healthier brands may not have the same amount of money to spend on marketing campaigns involving sports clubs and personalities.

## Parents' views on money issues

***"I find the use of sports personalities to promote less healthy food to be dreadful. Most are already very wealthy and certainly don't need the money, they should be ashamed of their greed."***

*"The sportsmen and women should give more thought to the supporters of sport and less about their bank balance. It is all about money for them e.g. sponsorship."*

***"It seems to me that the promotion of less healthy food by famous sportspersons is all about money. They don't care even a tiny bit about the potential damage it is doing to childrens' (and parents') perception of food. I think it is dreadful."***

*"It's irresponsible for sports personalities to take money from these companies when they are unlikely to consume less healthy foods themselves."*

***"Why do sports stars need to top up their overinflated pay cheques at the expense of the nation's health?"***

*"These are sponsors to help pay for their training."*

***"Most of these sports need the money and super healthy brands haven't got that kind of money."***

*"Parents should sometimes need to be reassured."*

## Normalising less healthy food and drink

Parents felt that the promotion of less healthy food and drink through the various platforms sport has normalised less healthy food and drink. Again, to flip the conversation these sports personalities could instead promote the products that they typically consume to show children what types of food they actually consume.

## Parents' views on normalising less healthy food

***"It doesn't hugely worry me but it does normalise treat food which with the obesity crisis we could probably do without."***

*"If the marketing didn't work then the companies would not sponsor the big sporting events. The more children see these sponsorships the more the less healthy food is normalised for them and it becomes part of their mindset."*

***"It is normal for sport stars to look after their health, show the sports stars eating healthy breakfasts instead. Playing sports should be promoted, how to join local teams, how to start your own team, how to get active and look after your health. Make that normal instead."***

## Education and parent power

- 9 in 10 (91%) parents in our survey told us the marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport makes it harder for parents to feed their children a healthy diet.

Some parents felt that the focus should be on educating children and parents about a healthy diet, which would mean the adverts wouldn't have any effect.

## Parents' views on the role of education

***"Parents need to be educated to provide nutritious foods for their children. Advertising less healthy foods in sports shouldn't sway a parent's decision in providing a particular meal. Eating balanced diets with less healthy foods occasionally is ok. and parents should have the ability to say no to their children when asked for these foods."***

*"Parents are responsible for what their children eat. Education is key and it needs to change in schools when they have cooking lessons. All my son learnt to make was a pizza, a chocolate cake and a cheesy twist. Hardly inspiring or make a healthy meal."*

Whilst almost all parents in our survey recognised the role and responsibilities they have to encourage a healthy food relationship, some expressed frustration that this role was being undermined.

## Parents' views on the challenges advertising presents

***"This sort of advertising undermines the daily battle parents have with trying to ensure their children are eating more healthy foods. It's hard to fight against a visual image of a successful sports player endorsing McDonalds and then tell a child that they shouldn't eat it as it's bad for you. The obvious argument would be 'well XX eats it and he's not fat/less healthy/ill etc'."***

*"It may make it difficult to say no to children who want the less healthy foods associated with their idols/favourite sports people. It doesn't really make sense to associate high sugar/fat items with fitness, why not use their powerful positions to promote good health?"*

***"It is very difficult for parents to make healthy eating as cool as less healthy food. Less healthy food has been processed by someone, branded and is advertised - some with sports associations to make it appear healthy. Healthy food tends to be natural, not processed by anyone (owned) and therefore not 'branded', not advertised. The challenge as a parent is to counter advertising, convenience consumption, gimmicks and packaging...sports personalities (heroism), environmental pressures, peer pressure and society pressure even in schools where too often sugary snacks are given as rewards and even used as part of 'education' - shocking. I am a parent who battles against all of this... but I fear I am one of few..."***

Some parents felt more strongly that it is their responsibility to stand up against the influences of food and drink marketing, and to hold firm with their children.

## Parents' views on parental responsibility

*"I get that it's annoying having Coke and Walkers on stuff, but parents do also at some point need to teach their kids that this stuff is for occasional treats rather than all the time."*

***"It would be preferable that they weren't advertised in sport but it is down to parents to educate and not be influenced themselves or give into pester power."***

*"Parents should be good role models to their children. I have no problem with wearing shirts with advertisements on."*

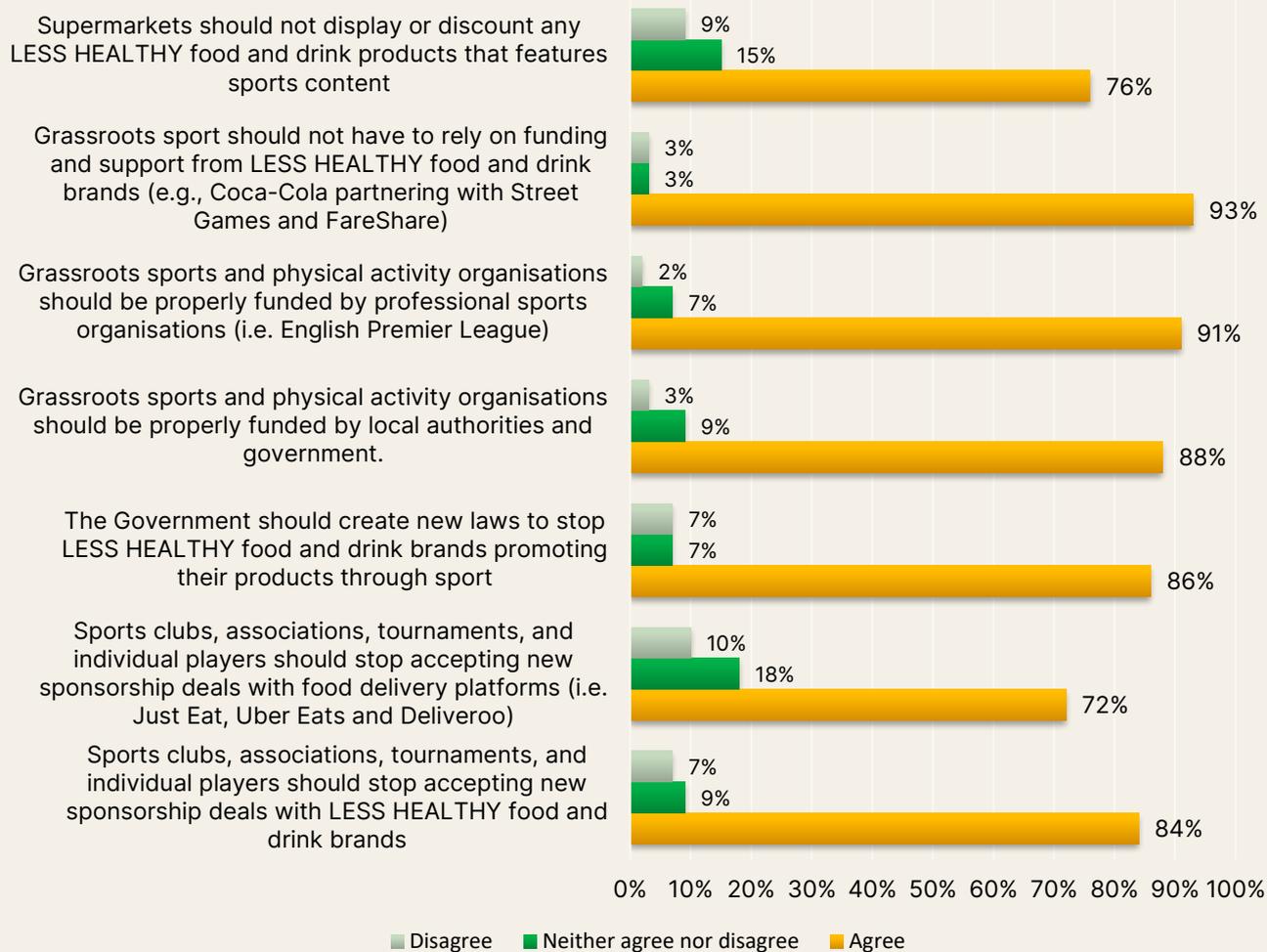
***"As a parent it's important to set boundaries with your children. If my child asks for something and I don't want them to have it, I will say no. Setting certain days for the less healthier food choices sets expectations."***

Food Active and the Children's Food Campaign are conscious that this theme of parental responsibility is also how the obesity debate is often framed in the media and public discourse. There is a culture of blaming parents, which also deflects attention from some of the systemic food industry trends that influence parents and children alike. Rebalancing the relationship between the sports industry and food and drink brands towards healthier options would support and empower parents in their own role too.

## Support for policy measures

We set out to gauge parents' level of support for measures to restrict the level of marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport. We presented parents with a range of different measures, and they were asked to state whether they would agree or disagree with each of the statements.

**Please state if you agree or disagree with the following statements.**



**Figure 3:** Parents' responses when asked about actions to tackle less healthy food and drink sponsorship.

What was very clear with the parents we spoke to, is that they were very supportive of ensuring grassroots sport and physical activity organisations are properly funded and that they should not be having to rely on food and drink brands to supply funding for these groups.

- 9 in 10 parents believe grassroots sport should not have to rely on funding and support from less healthy food and drink brands (93.2%)
- 9 in 10 parents also supported the idea that grassroots sports and physical activity organisations should be properly funded by professional sports organisations
- Almost 9 in 10 parents (88%) would also like to see grassroots sports and physical activity organisations properly funded by local authorities and government.

***"I think sponsorship from the products mentioned in this survey should be discouraged by the Government and governing bodies of each sport."***

*Parent response, 2021*

There was also strong support for Government action to create a level playing field for sports sponsorship.

- Over 8 in 10 parents (86%) would like to see the Government create laws to stop less healthy partnerships between less healthy food brands and sport.

***"I think advertising of less healthy food, particularly that which is aimed at children, needs to be banned (in the same way that cigarette advertising was). Sport celebrities have the opportunity to promote healthy lifestyles and need to do this to help children and their parents make healthy choices." Parent response 2021***

In the absence of such legislation, parents would like to see the sporting industry itself voluntarily rejecting any new sponsorship deals with less healthy food and drink brands.

- Over 8 in 10 parents (84%) agree that sports associations, clubs, tournaments, venues and players should reject any future sponsorship deals with less healthy food and drink brands.

A lower priority to parents was sports clubs refusing new partnerships with food delivery platforms (72% agree, 10% disagree) and supermarkets not displaying or discounting any less healthy food and drink products that feature sports content (76% agree, 8.5% disagree).

## Demographics

- Of the 420 people who attempted to take the survey, 74 were disqualified for either not living in the UK or having children over 18 years old. This meant the total number of parents who completed the survey was 346.
- Of these parents, 62.8% had primary school aged children and 45.5% had secondary school aged children.
- 80.9% identified themselves as female, 17.6% male and 1.5% preferred not to say.
- 78.8% identified themselves as white - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British.
- The majority of participants either had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree as their highest level of qualifications.

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***Sustain:** The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level. [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)*

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***Food Active:** Food Active is a healthy weight programme delivered by the Health Equalities Group, and commissioned by local authority public health teams, NHS organisations, and Public Health England teams at both regional and national level. [www.foodactive.org.uk](http://www.foodactive.org.uk)*