**Advertising ban won't help fat kids**

**John Birmingham The Age May 12, 2011**

There’s a reason why 84 per cent of people support a ban on junk food advertising during kids' television schedules. Because it’s a hell of a lot easier than doing anything that might actually make a difference to the chubby little ticks, like turning off the damn TV for a start and kicking them out the door to go run around for a bit.

You have to wonder how many of that 84 per cent have cupboards full of chips and biscuits, and freezers full o' pies and nasty, factory made pizzas. How many of them let their kids guzzle down soft drinks and fruit juice every day, or fill their lunch bags with unhealthy food?

Yeah, banning junk food adverts will make a hell of a difference.

The childhood obesity wheeze is getting a bit of a run this week because of the [**ad ban call**](http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/junk-food-advertising-rules-are-a-pantomime-20110510-1egld.html) by the Obesity Policy Coalition, and while I’m hell on obesity, having been there for too many years, I gotta wonder what the hell this coalition of well meaning busybodies is thinking.

If they’re serious, they could be looking on the other side of the screen for answers, because any kid allowed to sit around for hours of an afternoon blobbing out in front of the teev is well on the way to fat camp long before fast food advertisers (who are, admittedly, history’s greatest monsters) get their hooks in.

Just as the answer to ads is turn the television off, the answer to junk food is to, er, not eat junk food.

But here’s the rub, eh?

I wonder how many people, especially working parents, can be arsed cooking even basic meat and three veg at the end of the day. Even worse, I wonder sometimes how many are even capable of it.

It is so easy to fall into habitual eating when cooking for kids, that if you start with a handicap in the kitchen anyway, your habits are almost certainly going to end up trending bad.

This is one of the real reasons for childhood obesity. Not advertising, but a generation of parents who can’t cook for themselves let alone their kids. There really is no policy answer to this. The government can’t mandate taste or culinary skill amongst the grown up population.

But there are things that can be done for the little porkers and, good news flash, they are being done. Programs like the [**Stephanie Alexander’s Kitchen Gardens**](http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/) are spreading through primary schools, not just teaching kids how to cook and appreciate fresh food, but integrating those lessons with the rest of curriculum. (At my kids school, for instance, the Italian classes are sometimes rolled into the pasta making classes, like a big, tasty *cannoli* of learning).

It’s not the sort of thing that’s going to change a kid’s life immediately, especially if the kitchen situation at home remains dire, but it is a start and it holds out the prospect that when those children grow up they might actually avoid the traps their parents laid for them.

I’d be a lot more impressed with the Obesity Coalition if they got behind policy like that rather than the empty theatre of ad bans.