

## Children's 'healthy' foods marketed at children are higher in fat, sugar and salt

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Foods being marketed to children in UK supermarkets are less healthy than those marketed to the general population according to researchers at the University of Hertfordshire, who question whether more guidelines may be needed in regulating food marketed to children.

With the rise in [childhood obesity](#) across Europe, there has been much attention on how governments can reduce the advertising of products with high fat, sugar and/or salt levels, directly to children. Much of the focus has been on [snack foods](#) like confectionery and [soft drinks](#). However, this study found that foods marketed to children that are often considered to be 'healthy' foods, such as yoghurts, cereal bars and ready meals, were still found to be higher in fat, sugar and salt than those marketed to the general population.

Dr Kirsten Rennie, from the University of Hertfordshire's Centre for Lifespan and Chronic Illness Research, said: "Consumers may think that foods marketed for children, using [cartoon characters](#) and promoted for lunchboxes might be healthier options than the equivalent foods marketed more for adults. In fact we found that it was the opposite. Foods like yoghurts and cereal bars often had substantially more fat and sugar per 100g than similar adult-version products. This is very worrying and does not help consumers' confidence in choosing appropriate healthy foods for their children."

Nutritional data was collected on yoghurts, cereal bars and [ready meals](#) from seven major UK supermarkets and categorised as children's or non-

children's products based on the characteristic, promotional nature or information on the product packaging. Fat, sugar and [salt content](#) was compared per 100g and per recommended [portion size](#).

Dr Angela Madden, Principal Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "This study was co-ordinated by one of our students, Amy Lythgoe, who graduated with a BSc (Hons) Dietetics in 2011. Amy and the research team have provided some useful new evidence which will help parents become aware that choosing foods that are marketed to children may not be the healthiest option. This is an opportunity for food manufacturers to look at their child-orientated products and think about how they can improve them."

The research paper "Marketing foods to children: A comparison of nutrient content between children's and non-children's products" is published in *Public Health Nutrition Journal*.

**More information:** Lythgoe, A. et al. Marketing foods to children: a comparison of nutrient content between children's and non-children's products, *Public Health Nutrition* (May 2013).

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