

Baby foods packed with fruit and vegetables, but unlikely to encourage children to eat their greens

August 31 2015



Credit: Matka Wariatka

Commercial baby foods contain large amounts of vegetables but are probably too sweet to encourage children to eat their greens, say

scientists.

A study has shown commercial baby foods use predominantly fruit and sweet [vegetables](#), like carrot, rather than bitter ones like spinach. This lack of variety is unlikely to promote the development of bitter tastes in youngsters, say the authors.

The study of 329 brand-name products revealed sweet fruit and vegetables contribute significantly to [sugar content](#) and appear to be used as sweetening agents. Fruits were mentioned more than vegetables in the names of baby foods and even savoury foods contained an average of 3-7% sugar.

Dr Ada Garcia, of the University of Glasgow, who led the research, said: "Infants have an innate preference for sweet foods.

"While manufacturers clearly recognise the demand for products that appear to be healthy, commercial pressure will ensure these products are highly palatable.

"Taste learning requires parents to introduce their children to less palatable bitter tastes and keep offering them, however, it is probably unrealistic to expect commercial products to assist in this process.

"Health practitioners need to encourage parents to offer home-cooked vegetables to promote taste experience in children."

The researchers looked at products from all the major manufacturers – Organix, Hipp Organix, Heinz, Ella's Kitchen, Cow and Gate, Boots and Plum Baby and scanned for mentions of fruit and vegetables in the names and analysed the contents.

They found:

- 329 baby foods labelled as containing fruits or vegetables or both in the name,
- Fruits more commonly featured in the names than vegetables,
- Fruit juice added to 18% of products, with a median content of 15g/100g added fruit juice,
- The median content of fruit and vegetables ranged from 94% for sweet-spoonable foods, to 13% for dry savoury,
- The most common ingredients mentioned were: apple, banana, tomato, mango, carrot and sweet potato,
- Green vegetables were rarely used
- The foods in the study had a median number of three fruits and vegetables per food,
- The majority of baby foods are recommended from four months of age, which adheres to EU regulations, but contradicts WHO recommendations on the appropriate age of weaning.

Dr Garcia said: "It is worth noting the sugar content of spoonable commercial baby foods mirrors average that of breast milk. So, if 6–8-month-old babies ate 303g of spoonable baby food according to the WHO recommended intake of 200 kcal/day from complementary foods, they would get exactly 40% energy intake from total sugars from the baby food (20.6g total sugar/day, which amounts to a total of 82 kcal from total sugars).

"Thus, as long as the baby eats a mix of savoury and sweet foods and no more than the recommended amount, the amount of sugar in these foods would not exceed recommendations, although we do not know if that is a healthy pattern for complementary feeding.

"In Western countries commercial baby foods are widely used to introduce babies to complementary food, with two-thirds of mothers giving a commercial baby food as a first solid food.

"A recent study showed that while commercial baby foods list fruit and vegetables as ingredients, higher use of these foods was associated with lower intake of fruit and vegetables in infancy which persisted into school age.

"The risk is that while parents may think commercial baby foods are introducing their children to healthy vegetable tastes, actually, they are mainly reinforcing preferences for sweet foods.

"Infants usually accept new foods and tastes well if vegetable tastes are introduced early, and this early experience influences food preference later in childhood."

The study, entitled 'Types of fruits and vegetables used in commercial [baby foods](#) and their contribution to sugar content' is published in the journal *Maternal & Child Nutrition*.

More information: "Types of fruits and vegetables used in commercial baby foods and their contribution to sugar content." *Maternal & Child Nutrition*. doi: 10.1111/mcn.12208

Provided by University of Glasgow

Citation: Baby foods packed with fruit and vegetables, but unlikely to encourage children to eat their greens (2015, August 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-baby-foods-fruit-vegetables-children.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.