

Misleading claims on sugar-rich cereals

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The BDA has called for sweeping changes to food marketing and product formulation, as new research by Cardiff University reveals the extent of misleading claims on sugar-rich cereals aimed at children.

Analysis of packaging for the 13 top selling cereals, published in the

British Dental Journal, has revealed:

- At the manufacturer's suggested portion sizes, 8 out of 13 top cereals provide over half the Public Health England recommended daily sugar intake for 4-6 year olds.
- Imagery used on packets depicts servings three times the size of manufacturers recommended portion sizes. Children eating these volumes would exceed their daily sugar allowance by 12.5 percent on a single bowl alone.
- The majority of products featured potentially misleading nutritional claims, designed to offer a 'halo effect' leaving consumers to consider them healthier than warranted, or ignore other warnings. 11 out of 13 products made claims regarding one or more vitamins, while 8 out of 13 were considered extremely high in sugar.
- Emotive language, such as 'yummy', 'magical' or 'meet new friends' dominated products aimed at children, with reassuring language on 'quality' and supposed nutritional value designed to appeal to parents.

Cereals are currently the second largest contributors of free sugars in children's diets, accounting for 8 percent of intake for 4-10 year olds, and 7 percent for teenagers. Previous studies have concluded exaggerated portion sizes can contribute to consumers pouring up to 42 percent more cereal than recommended.

The BDA has expressed concern that cereal packet imagery continues to fall outside the Committee of Advertising Practice code relating to high fat, salt or sugary foods to children. It has called on the government to deliver both concrete changes to marketing guidelines and mandatory targets for sugar reduction, as part of its landmark Obesity Strategy.

Tooth decay remains the number one reason for hospital admissions

among children aged 5-9.

Russ Ladwa, Chair of the BDA's Health and Science Committee, said: "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but sadly marketers are misleading the public on what constitutes healthy options and acceptable portion sizes.

"It's a toxic mix, with claims on 'nutritional benefits' designed to blind consumers to sugar content, images of super-sized portions to encourage overconsumption, and emotive language to fuel pester power. The result is a recipe for [tooth decay](#) and obesity.

"These billboards on our breakfast tables still fall entirely outside advertising regulations for marketing sugary foods to kids. Until government tightens up marketing rules, and sets concrete targets on reformulation, the UK will miss [sugar](#) reduction targets by a country mile."

The study's co-author, Maria Morgan, Senior Lecturer in Dental Public Health at Cardiff University, said: "The big thing for me is the normalisation of bigger portion sizes in Britain, which is affecting childhood obesity, adult obesity and oral health. I don't like parents being hoodwinked by the imagery.

"I would welcome reformulation of these products. We need to work with the industry on this. I am also worried about food labelling post-Brexit because currently food labelling conforms with EU regulations and going forward we want it as good as if not better than what we have now."

Provided by Cardiff University

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