

Range of commercial infant foods has grown markedly in past seven years

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The range of commercial foods on sale for babies has grown rapidly in recent years but their sugar levels are still too high, suggests research published in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

Although fewer foods are now being marketed to infants aged four months, there are far more [snack](#) foods for babies being sold and the sweetness of savoury foods designed for babies is a concern, researchers found.

Although parents are encouraged to offer home-made baby foods, 58% of UK babies are estimated to receive commercial baby foods between the ages of 6 and 12 months.

In their previous research in 2013, a team of researchers from the University of Glasgow's College of Medical Veterinary and Life Sciences, reported concerns about the nutrition quality and recommendations in food labels of these foods.

Experts recommend that the transition from an exclusively milk-based diet to solid foods for an infant should be a gradual process, starting at around 6 months. But the Glasgow team found that many commercial baby foods were marketed to infants from age 4 months, and nearly half the products were sweet.

For their latest study, the same researchers set out to assess how the baby food market in the UK has changed between 2013 and 2019, by carrying

out a cross-sectional survey of all infant food products available to buy in the UK online and in-store in 2019.

Nutritional content and product descriptions were recorded and compared with an existing 2013 database.

They set out to measure changes in the proportion of products marketed to infants aged 4 months, proportion classified as sweet versus savoury, and spoonable versus dry (snacks) average sugar content.

Overall, there was an increase in commercial baby [food](#) products with 84% more brands and double the products compared with 2013.

Results showed there were 32 brands selling baby foods including 27 brands that were not included in 2013.

In 2019, a total of 898 commercial baby foods were identified. Of these, 611 (68%) were spoonable products, mostly packed in pouches (54%), while 253 (28%) were dry products.

The researchers focused on 865 products overall for their analysis to be in line with their 2013 survey.

Analysis of the results showed there were fewer products described as suitable for infants aged 4 months in 2019 (201 or 23%) compared with 2013 (178 or 43%), while the proportion for children in the 6-7-month age range increased from 135 (or 33%) in 2013 to 369 (or 43%) in 2019.

The proportion of sweet and savoury products was unchanged while sweet spoonable products showed a small but [significant decrease](#) in sugar content (6%) between 2013 and 2019.

However, savoury spoonable products showed a 16% increase in sugar

content.

Sweet snacks remained very sweet and in the 2019 data, concentrated juice was added to 29% of products and 18% of "savoury" products were comprised of more than 50% sweet vegetables or fruit.

The number and proportion of snacks increased markedly in 2019 to 185 compared with just 42 in 2013 while the proportion of wet spoonable foods decreased from 79% in 2013 to 71% in 2019.

The researchers said that although clinical evidence was currently unavailable, the health consequences of snacking for baby feeding skills, liquid/milk intake and continued exposure to sugars in the oral cavity were likely to have implications for healthy eating guidelines.

Further research on the prevalence and extent of these marketing strategies was required, they say, and there may be a need for tighter regulations on packaging to discourage the use of baby snacks.

They conclude: "The product range of commercial infant foods has expanded dramatically in the last 7 years, both in the number of brands and the types of [products](#). Fewer foods are now marketed to infants aged 4 months, but the increase in [snack foods](#) and the sweetness of savoury foods is a concern."

More information: Ada Lizbeth Garcia et al, Changes in the UK baby food market surveyed in 2013 and 2019: the rise of baby snacks and sweet/savoury foods, *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2020-318845](https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2020-318845)

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