

# Nutritional value of foods static despite targets on calories, salt and sugar

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Company Name	Year				p-value	Sales-weighted score 30 67
	2015	2016	2017	2018		
Danone	64	65	66	66	0.48	
Kraft Heinz	62	62	63	62	0.96	
PepsiCo	60	59	59	60	0.97	
Kellogg	53	53	54	56	0.93	
Premier Foods	52	53	54	54	0.45	
Coca-Cola	48	48	48	51	0.61	
Mars	39	39	39	39	0.21	
Unilever	39	38	39	38	0.48	
Nestlé	32	32	31	35	0.59	
Mondelez	31	30	30	31	0.80	

Total sales-weighted nutrient profiling score by company and year. Credit:

Bandy et al, 2021, PLOS ONE (CC-BY 4.0,  
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UK policies that set targets for reductions in salt, sugar and calories have not led to overall improvements in the nutritional value of food products. Research published in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* evaluates foods produced by the top ten food and beverage companies over a four year period and recommends further policy action be taken to support consumers to eat more healthily.

Poor diet is associated with [chronic diseases](#) and complications for individuals and leads to a substantial burden on [health systems](#). Public Health England (PHE) has introduced voluntary reformulation targets focused on salt, [sugar](#) and calories to encourage change by manufacturers. Dr. Lauren Bandy and colleagues at the University of Oxford's Nuffield Department of Population Health wanted to assess how the nutritional quality of products changed over time. They identified the top ten UK food and drink manufacturers and their brands and used an established nutrient profile model to look at the nutrient composition data for each item for four consecutive years—2015, 16, 17 and 18.

They found no change in the nutrient profiling score of products over time, though one company, Kelloggs, showed a small overall improvement, driven by reducing sugar in two products: Coco-pops and Special K. There was a small increase in the number of products classified as healthy: 46 percent in 2015 to 47 percent in 2018, and an increase in sales that were considered healthy: 44 percent in 2015 to 51 percent in 2018. This is likely because of reductions in the sugar content of some soft drinks, following an industry levy introduced in 2018. Of the top five brands sold by each of the ten companies only six improved

their nutritional score by 20 percent or more.

Dr. Lauren Bandy of the University of Oxford's Nuffield Department of Population Health says: "Our study shows it is possible to monitor the overall healthiness of [company](#) product portfolios and chart changes over time. We saw little evidence that the recommended current targets have made a significant difference and we believe that without more policy action and a transparent monitoring and evaluation system, it is unlikely there will be meaningful change."

She adds: "We know that if we are to see the reduction in diet-related disease that is needed in the population, the [food](#) and beverage industry has to step up and improve the nutritional quality of its products. Our study shows that so far, not much has been done to improve the healthiness of household brands owned by top companies, with the exception of soft drinks, which are subject to a tax that has encouraged lower sugar levels. The current focus on voluntary, single-nutrient reformulation targets might want to be reconsidered by policy makers."

**More information:** Bandy LK, Hollowell S, Harrington R, Scarborough P, Jebb S, Rayner M (2021) Assessing the healthiness of UK food companies' product portfolios using food sales and nutrient composition data. *PLoS ONE* 16(8): e0254833.  
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