

Call to stop misleading parents with claims on children's yogurts

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Progress to reformulate and reduce added sugar in yogurts with child friendly packaging (and in line with government guidance) is disappointingly sluggish, according to research carried out by Action on

Sugar based at Queen Mary University of London.

New data analysis (which surveyed 100 children's yogurts) has revealed a minuscule 1 in 20 (5 percent) of products which featured cartoon animations, characters and designs deliberately to target children were rated low (green) in sugar. What's more, over half (63 percent) of all yogurts provide a third or more of a four- to six-year-old's maximum daily intake for added sugars (19g) per serving.

The worst offender was Nestlé Rolo Mix-in Toffee yogurt with 5.5 teaspoons of sugar per serve (22g)—that's as much sugar as 16 Malted Milk Biscuits, followed by Nestlé Smarties Vanilla Flavour yogurt, with 4 teaspoons of sugar per serve (16.5g).

The group of experts is now calling for government restrictions on using child friendly packaging, and nutrition and [health claims](#) on yogurts (high or medium in sugar) to stop misleading parents.

Misleading packaging

Despite these yogurts containing added sugar, syrups and fruit concentrates (all of which are "free sugars" known to be harmful to children's health and their teeth), claims about calcium, vitamin D, and being high in protein are often championed on pack. This creates a distorted "health halo," suggesting the products are completely healthy with only sugars from natural sources such as lactose from milk, which distracts parents from scrutinizing the nutrition labels more carefully.

Although the average total fat content of the surveyed yogurts is generally low i.e. three-quarters (77 percent) obtain a green rating for fat, the saturated fat in the yogurts, which contributes to poor heart health, is less positive.

Two-thirds (67 percent) of yogurts surveyed were either medium or high in saturated fat. Curiously, the two products with the highest saturated fat content were dairy-alternative products which are often perceived to be healthier. These include The Coconut Collaborative Strawberry & Banana and The Coconut Collaborative Mango & Passionfruit (6.1g saturated fat per 100g).

Registered Nutritionist Dr. Kawther Hashem, Campaign Lead at Action on Sugar says: "Parents can easily be misled when walking through the [yogurt](#) aisle in the supermarket. Often companies try to avert our eyes from seeing the significant amount of sugar listed in the ingredients and nutrition tables, by using healthy sounding claims and cartoony images on the front of pack.

"Given only 5 percent of yogurts with child friendly packaging would have a green colored label as being 'healthy' for sugar, [food companies](#) must make every effort to reduce the sugar in these products, particularly the ones targeted so explicitly towards children."

Katharine Jenner, campaign director at Action on Sugar says: "Clever marketing techniques such as advertising, promotions and packaging are powerful tools to get children hooked on the sweet stuff from a young age and for life. Whilst the Government's Obesity Strategy is taking bold steps to tackle unhealthy advertising and promotions, they now need to ensure food companies only use cartoons and health halo statements on their healthier products, allowing parents to see more of what is good for their children."

Graham MacGregor CBE—chairman of Action on Sugar, professor of cardiovascular medicine, Queen Mary University of London says: "With ten children out of every class of thirty leaving [primary school](#) either overweight or obese, it is imperative that food companies act more responsibly and commit to reformulate [sugar](#), salt and calorie reduction

instead of foisting unhealthy products on us that contain child friendly packaging with misleading nutrition and health claims."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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