

Call for removal of misleading sugar claims on baby and toddler sweet snacks

November 10 2021



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A new product survey by Action on Sugar—based at Queen Mary University of London—has exposed the alarming amounts of sugars found in many baby and toddler sweet snacks such as biscuits, rusks, oat

bars and puffs. With some products containing a massive two teaspoons of sugar per serve, this is of deep concern considering babies and toddlers should not be eating any free sugars at all. In fact, children aged between the ages of 1.5 and 3 years are exceeding 27.9g (equivalent of 7 teaspoons) of free sugars per day, according to the National Diet and Nutrition Survey.

To mark Sugar Awareness Week, the group of experts is calling for misleading on-pack marketing claims to be removed—especially around 'no [added sugar](#)/refined [sugar](#)' when such ingredients are replaced by fruit concentrates (which are still a type of free sugars and should be limited).

Action on Sugar is also urging the Government to finally publish its long-awaited composition guidelines for baby and toddler products which will guide manufacturers on how much sugars should be used—making them mandatory in order to create a level-playing field across the sector.

The product survey, which analyzed 73 baby and toddler sweet snacks sold in stores, found Heinz Farley's Mini Rusks Original to be the worst offender with 8.7g of sugars per serving—that's the equivalent of 2 teaspoons of sugar. Despite the health claims about added vitamins and minerals on pack, this product also contains added sugar. This was followed by Organix Banana Soft Oaty Bars at 8.1g of sugars per serve which are sweetened with apple juice concentrate.

When it comes to sugars per 100g—a third of the products surveyed would receive a red (high) label for sugars if baby and toddler foods carried [traffic light](#) labeling on front of pack.

Rather worryingly, five Kiddylicious products scored the worst for sugars per 100g: Kiddylicious Banana Crispy Tiddlers are made up of over half sugars (59g per 100g), while Kiddylicious Pineapple, Coconut

& Mango Juicy Fruit Bars are nearly a third sugars (30.7g per 100g).

Only six products out of 73 (8 percent) would get a green (low) label for sugars.

Currently, there is a gap in legislation for labeling baby and children's [food](#) and drink with front of pack traffic light labeling which means these products are not required to display them. Yet all the products surveyed that would be red (high) for sugars (under the current traffic light system) also featured a claim that could be distracting and possibly misleading. For example, "Packed with vitamins and minerals" or "Made with real fruit"—despite containing added sugar, fruit juice concentrates or similar—all of which are free sugars and considered harmful to health.

What's more, a quarter of the products (36 out of 73) surveyed claim on-pack that their sweet snacks are suitable for [babies](#) under the age of 12 months even though sugar sweetened food and drink should be avoided in this age group.

Following a public opinion poll by Action on Sugar of 1,000 parents with [young children](#) (aged between 1–3 years old) to gain insights on what motivates them when choosing products for their babies:

- Over 8 out of 10 (84 percent) said they buy these so called 'healthy' baby and toddler sweet snacks for their children.
- 6 out of 10 (60 percent) say that a 'no added sugar' claim would be the reason for choosing a particular product.
- 92 percent said they were more inclined to buy products containing 'natural sources' of sugars (e.g. fruit).

Dr. Kawther Hashem, Campaign Lead at Action on Sugar and Research Fellow at Queen Mary University of London said: "It's ludicrous that

certain food companies are being allowed to promote their high sugar sweet snacks to parents with very young children, despite them being aware that babies and toddlers shouldn't be having any free sugars.

"Babies can have a preference for sweet foods, due to milk being ever so slightly sweet, but liking sugary foods is something they only learn by eating sugary foods. Some companies choose to encourage this preference further by providing lots of very sweet products from an early age. What we need is companies to make products with minimal amount of sugars, so young children can grow up enjoying less sweet foods."

Professor Graham MacGregor, professor of cardiovascular medicine at Queen Mary University of London and chairman of Action on Sugar, added: "Consuming too much sugar on a regular basis means we're eating too many calories. If we don't use those calories as fuel, our body will store them as fat. This can lead to weight gain, and if this happens to our children, it's likely they will carry the weight into their adolescent and adult years, potentially leading to overweight or obesity, as well as suffering from agonizing tooth decay. It is therefore imperative that [food companies](#) act more responsibly and commit to reformulate sugar, salt and calorie reduction instead of foisting unhealthy products with misleading nutrition claims upon well-meaning parents."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

Citation: Call for removal of misleading sugar claims on baby and toddler sweet snacks (2021, November 10) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-sugar-baby-toddler-sweet-snacks.html>

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