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Call for a Clampdown on Misleading Nutrition and Health Claims on Baby & Toddler Food and Drink Hiding High Levels of Sugar

- **NEW shock survey reveals the baby food & drink aisle may not be as nutritious as we think – with some breakfast items containing a whopping 4 teaspoons of sugar per serving**
- **Over three quarters of products claim to have ‘no added sugars’ or ‘only naturally occurring sugars’ despite many containing sugars from fruit juices, concentrates and purees – all of which are harmful to dental health**
- **Action on Sugar is calling for the removal of misleading nutrition and health claims on ALL infant food and drink products and for the new Health Minister to publish and mandate the long-awaited *Commercial baby food and drink guidelines* without delay**

NEW research¹ by **Action on Sugar** (based at Queen Mary University of London) has revealed the worrying levels of sugars added unnecessarily to breakfast foods intended for babies and toddlers, with some containing 4 teaspoons² of sugar per pouch. That’s despite government guidance that no added sugars, including those from processed fruit, should be consumed by children up to the age of 2 years old³.

To mark Sugar Awareness Week (14th-20th November), Action on Sugar is calling on the complete removal of misleading nutrition and health claims on baby and toddler food & drink products and urging the new Health Minister Steve Barclay to publish and mandate the overdue ***Commercial baby food and drink guidelines***⁴. This will ensure dedicated baby aisles in supermarkets are a ‘safe space’ for parents.

The product survey, which analysed nearly 100 baby and toddler breakfast items sold in stores, found ***Ella’s Kitchen’s Banana, Apple & Blueberry Baby Rice*** had the highest sugar per serve, with 14.5g sugars per pouch (equivalent to 4 teaspoons sugar). This was followed by ***Ella’s Kitchen’s Banana Baby Brekkie*** (13.6g per serve) and ***Ella’s Kitchen Bananas, Apricots + Baby Rice*** (13.5g per serve).

Table 1. Examples of baby and toddler breakfasts with higher and lower levels of sugars per serve

		Sugars / Serve (g)
Flavoured Baby Rice		
Highest	Ella’s Kitchen Banana, Apple and blueberry Baby Rice	14.5
Lowest	Ella’s Kitchen Pear and Peach Baby Rice Pouch	10.0
Prepared Flavoured Porridge		
Highest	Ella’s Kitchen Overnight Oats with Apple Pieces Banana + Poppy Seeds Dairy Free	12.0
Lowest	Ella’s Kitchen Dairy Free with Coconut milk pear and fig porridge	7.3
Yogurt Based Breakfast (Fruit Flavoured)		
Highest	Ella’s Kitchen Banana Baby Brekkie	13.6
Lowest	Little Freddie Creamy Pink Lady Apple Greek Style Yogurt Pouch	5.3

What's more, ALL products surveyed used nutrition or health claims on-pack and over three quarters (86%) used a 'no added sugar' or 'only naturally occurring sugars' claim⁵. However, many add sugars in the form of fruit/vegetable juices, concentrates, purees and powders (types of sugars that should be limited⁶) misleading parents/carers into thinking that the product is healthier than it is. **Little Freddie** was the only brand responsibly choosing not to use these claims on their products.

Worryingly, **Heinz By Nature Creamed Porridge** uses plain sugar as an ingredient yet champions the claims 'Only natural ingredients' in addition to 'Sugar from a natural source' which is not listed as a legally permitted claim.

Babease Simply Smooth Avocado Breakfast with Yogurt, Spinach & Oats (3.5g sugars per serve) was the only product in this survey that used vegetables (no additional fruit) as a flavour for their product. This significantly reduces the overall sugars and introduces a less sweet flavour in a market that is otherwise saturated in sweet tasting breakfast products. In addition, by reducing the amount of processed fruit, flavour can be retained but sugars drastically cut by half - **HiPP Organic Banana Yogurt Breakfast, sugar content 6.9g/100g** uses around 40% less banana than **Ella's Kitchen Banana Baby Brekkie, 13.6g/100g**.

Whilst these products are convenient for time strapped parents and carers, findings from a public opinion poll⁷ by Action on Sugar, which sampled 1,004 parents with young children (aged between 6-36 months old) revealed two in three (65%) parents are concerned about the levels of sugar in ready-made/pre-packaged baby and toddler breakfast items, and the majority (87%) think it would be useful if the sugars added to baby and infant food, including that of processed fruit, was displayed on front of pack.

In 2016, the Government challenged the food industry to reduce the overall sugar content of certain food categories by 20% by 2020, but baby and toddler foods were not included in this programme⁸. Instead, the Government released draft **Commercial baby food and drink guidelines** for consultation in 2020 but did not then implement these guidelines. As a result, there is currently a gap in strict nutrition guidelines for these products, alongside worrying reports of high obesity prevalence and tooth decay in children starting school⁹.

The data published today signals a clear need for robust measures to incentivise the food industry to reduce sugar across a wide range of products, including those marketed for baby and toddlers. With **91% of parents⁶ supporting government action to make sure all food and drinks available in the baby aisle are nutritionally appropriate**, the overdue government guidelines for baby & toddler products are needed now to guide manufacturers on how much sugars should be used.

Zoe Davies (ANutr), Nutritionist at Action on Sugar says:

"This survey has shown that there is an overwhelming number of products that taste too sweet and contain too much sugar, especially since this age group is recommended to avoid eating food with added sugar including sugar from fruit juices, concentrates and purees. Parents put their trust in these companies to produce healthy age-appropriate meals for their babies but are misled by clever marketing and misleading claims dominating product packaging. The baby aisle should be seen as a safe space for parents and carers to go to for food that is suitable - not only texture wise, but nutritionally as well."

Hattie Burt (ANutr), Policy and Communications Officer at Action on Sugar added:

"Without clear guidance and regulation, the baby and infant food industry remains a Wild West, putting the health of our future generations at risk. It's clear the food industry can do more to support parents in making the best food choices for their children, but they won't do this without government leadership. We urge the Health Minister Steve Barclay to publish and mandate the *Commercial baby food and drink guidelines* without further delay."

Professor Graham MacGregor, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Queen Mary University of London and Chairman of Action on Sugar said:

“It’s a scandal that certain food companies are being allowed to peddle their high sugar products to parents with very young children – despite being aware that babies and toddlers shouldn’t be having any added at all. An unhealthy diet, high in saturated fat, salt and sugar, and low in fruit and vegetables, is the biggest cause of death and disability globally and costs the UK alone more than £100 billion annually. Our children should not have to suffer unnecessarily from this. Manufacturers should act responsibly and commit to reducing sugar, salt and calories instead of foisting unhealthy products with misleading nutrition claims upon well-meaning parents.”

Dr Linda Greenwall, founder of the Dental Wellness Trust said:

“Added sugar has found its way into almost all food and the use of sugar as a means to calm, entertain or reward children has become normalised rather than consumed as an occasional treat. This excess leads to toothache and suffering – not just in children but in adults too which is why tooth decay remains one of the most widespread health problems – all of which is entirely preventable. For this to change, manufacturers need to dramatically reduce the unnecessary sugar added to their products and the Government must help fund oral health prevention and tooth brushing programmes in schools and nurseries as an effective way of preventing this public health crisis from getting worse.”

Tips for healthier breakfast options in infants:

- Try to limit consumption of processed packaged baby and toddler foods as much as possible and choose low sugar cereals / breakfast items not in the baby aisle. Porridge, low sugar cereal and plain natural yogurt are great options for babies, with chopped fruit for extra flavour and nutrients
- Breakfast doesn’t have to be sweet: try savoury options such as eggs and vegetables
- Even if ‘No Added Sugars’ is declared on pack, watch out for ingredients such as fruit/vegetable juices, purees, concentrates and powders which include the type of sugars harmful to health
- Seek advice from trusted sources such as the [NHS](#), Registered Nutritionists and Dietitians

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

About Action on Sugar

Action on Sugar is a group of experts concerned with sugar and obesity and its effects on health. It is working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high calorie diet and bring about a reduction in the amount of sugar and fat in processed foods to prevent obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay.

¹ Survey details:

98 baby and toddler breakfast items were surveyed as part of this report, with data collected directly from packaging, in store from 10 major supermarkets/shops in August 2022, and online from brand/retailer websites. We collected data from all the baby and toddler breakfast items located in the baby aisle.

Data was shared with all manufacturers and comments were requested. Following this correspondence, we removed X Lidl products as they had been delisted.

We contacted Kraft Heinz to confirm their source of sugar and compliance to nutrition and health claims legislation but received no response.

² 4g sugar = 1 teaspoon. 14.5g sugar = 3.6 teaspoons

³ Public Health England 2016: Government Dietary Recommendations for energy and nutrients for males and females aged 1-18 years and 19+ years.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618167/government_dietary_recommendations.pdf

⁴ Public Health England 2019: Foods and drinks aimed at infants and young children: evidence and opportunities for action. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commercial-infant-and-baby-food-and-drink-evidence-review>

⁵ These are legally permitted claims under the Great Britain nutrition and claims (NHC) register, the following nutrition claims for sugar are permitted: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-britain-nutrition-and-health-claims-nhc-register>

Low sugars	A claim that a food is low in sugars, and any claim likely to have the same meaning for the consumer, may only be made where the product contains no more than 5 g of sugars per 100 g for solids or 2,5 g of sugars per 100 ml for liquids.
Sugars-free	A claim that a food is sugars-free, and any claim likely to have the same meaning for the consumer, may only be made where the product contains no more than 0,5 g of sugars per 100 g or 100 ml.
With no added sugars	A claim stating that sugars have not been added to a food, and any claim likely to have the same meaning for the consumer, may only be made where the product does not contain any added mono- or disaccharides or any other food used for its sweetening properties. If sugars are naturally present in the food, the following indication should also appear on the label: 'CONTAINS NATURALLY OCCURRING SUGARS'.
Naturally/natural	Where a food naturally meets the condition(s) laid down in the Annex of retained Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 for the use of a nutritional claim, the term 'naturally/natural' may be used as a prefix to the claim.

⁶ The definition of added sugars includes any sugars or caloric sweeteners that are added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation.

Government dietary advice on sugar changed significantly in 2015. Using the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) recommendation that sugar intakes should be assessed using a definition of free sugars, which is all added sugars in any form, including those naturally present in fruit and vegetable juices, purees and pastes

⁷ Action on Sugar commissioned Censuswide to conduct a public opinion poll with 1004 UK Parents of children ages 6-36 months between 02.11.2022 - 03.11.2022. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

⁸ Public Health England 2017. Sugar Reduction: Achieving the 20% <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-achieving-the-20>

⁹ National Child Measurement Programme, England, 2021/22 school year. The prevalence of children living with obesity is high, at 10.1%. This increases to 23.4% by the time they reach year 6. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-child-measurement-programme/2021-22-school-year>