



Action on Sugar
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Will Quince MP
Minister of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
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04.10.2023

Dear Will Quince,

We were concerned to see your response to our recent research regarding the nutrition content of breakfast cereals and yogurts that are marketed to children as 'a step too far' and a 'nanny state intervention'.

Our research found that just 9 out of 133 breakfast cereals and 6 out of 73 yogurts with child-appealing packaging available at the UK's leading retailers are nutritionally suitable for children. We called for measures to ensure that child-appealing packaging is only used on products that are nutritionally suitable, but this does not mean that other products would be in entirely 'plain' packaging. Rather, if a product is less healthy, then the packaging should be plainer, similar to packaging often used for products targeted to adults, such as Special K or natural yogurt.

A wealth of evidence proves that a range of sophisticated marketing techniques are used to make products appealing to children, which are persuasive and effective in influencing food preferences, choices and eating patterns. The food industry is actively being allowed to treat children as independent consumers, preying on their developmental vulnerabilities for commercial gain.

You also stated in your response that information such as calories, sugar and salt is already displayed on the front of product packaging; however, this is not a mandatory regulation and therefore not all products display this information. Companies that do display such labelling, may not use the Food Standards Agency colour-coded system for ease of comparison. Crucially, the red, amber and green colours used in the colour-coded system are based on an adult's recommended guidelines. Therefore, a product clearly marketed for a child, marked as low in sugars or salt for an adult may not be low for a child.

Education is just a drop in the ocean of measures that are needed to positively effect change. Unhealthy food has been made so available that it is almost unavoidable and is heavily promoted and significantly cheaper than healthier options. With this comes a devastating health impact: more than one in three children are above a healthy weight by the time they leave primary school, and the average percentage of children with visually obvious dental caries increases from 10.7% at 3 years old to 23.7% at 5 years old. In deprived communities, childhood obesity rates are over twice as high as in the most affluent areas.

Just two months ago, Neil O'Brien MP stated that the government was '*determined to halve childhood obesity by 2030*'¹. Rather than being 'nanny state', measures such as effective

reformulation programmes, clear nutrition labelling, restricting the advertising and promotion of less healthy food and drinks – measures that have all been proposed by successive Conservative governments over the past decade – are proportional and necessary if we are to get anywhere near the stated goal. Ensuring that only healthy, nourishing products have child-appealing packaging is surely the logical next step to halve childhood obesity.

The Government is responsible for protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing. Sadly, the ‘nanny’ is the food industry who put endless resource to ensuring their growth and profitability at the expense of children’s health. The health of our children, our future economic productivity and prosperity are inextricably linked with our current food environment. Unless bold preventive steps are taken, unhealthy food and drinks will continue to drive the unsustainable pressure on the NHS, economy and population health.

We would welcome a meeting with you to discuss this in more detail and would be happy to share evidence on the impact of marketing on child health.

Yours sincerely,

Action on Sugar