



# Calling on food and drink companies - Don't hide what's inside!

In partnership with

**LIVITY**



# Foreword

Misleading health claims influence the perceptions of many young people, even when there is no connection to actual nutritional quality. There have been many times when I thought I was being healthy by buying a smoothie or non-fat yoghurt, but in fact, I was exceeding my daily sugar allowance. Being healthy should be easy, but misleading health claims make it harder for people to be healthy. I didn't know that wholegrain cereals can be high in sugar. Many people are unaware of the serving size labels on food products, assuming that the entire container is a single serving, but it's actually two or three servings!

**Emily, 17**

Despite this issue really mattering to us, sometimes as young people we don't feel heard. It should be easy to eat healthily, as we have a right to honesty. These claims aren't just morally questionable, they are bad for us. From personal experience, I know just how hard it is for my family to do right by my 4-year-old younger sister, who has type 1 diabetes. We are all influenced by claims like "low sugar" and "no added sugars." These products have successfully led us to believe that they were good for her, even though some were not, culminating in unstable blood sugars that endangered her health.

**Anisah, 18**

Whilst at a training event with Bite Back, we had some 'Innocent Bubbles'- the name itself is quite ironic, "innocent". It's a fizzy drink and they were actually really nice. The packaging was super bright, had lots of different colours and were made to resemble the drink's fruit flavours. It made some bold health claims: "Tastes good, does good". Yet one can - yes one can - contains 20g of sugar. The system has misled me to believe that I was drinking a healthy and nutritious drink when in actual fact 67% of my daily allowance for sugar was gone. I drank 2 of those back-to-back because I thought they were healthy! I may as well have had a Coca-Cola. Other young people will be misled in the same way as I was, and that isn't fair.

**Jacob, 17**

**Emily, Anisah and Jacob are members of the Bite Back 2030 Youth Board**

# Executive Summary



There's no denying that misleading health claims and confusing nutritional information dominate many products found on supermarket shelves. Rather than provide much needed transparency, these clever marketing tactics are influencing perceptions and leading young people to believe food is 'healthy' when in fact, that's not always the case.

To help put this into context, Bite Back 2030 surveyed over 500 different food and drink products with 'health halos' driven by health, nutrition and marketing claims and within categories identified by our research as commonly consumed by teens. Astonishingly, over half (57%) of all products surveyed are high in either salt, saturated fat or sugar and would receive a red colour-coded nutritional information label. Worst still, when it comes to the drink products alone the figure rises to nearly two-thirds (62%) of all products which contain very high levels of sugar.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this, we wanted to demonstrate how difficult brands make it for young people to understand exactly what it is they are consuming and so we partnered with researchers from Livity and Action on Sugar to unpick what teens eat in a day i.e. the true nutritional content of those products; and how healthy young people perceive them to be and why?

As part of this research, we surveyed 1,000 young people aged 13 to 18 across the UK to dig deeper into the impact food and drink packaging has on what they perceive to be healthy. We also ran a week-long mobile diary exercise to capture what eight teens ate and drank on a daily basis.

<sup>1</sup>Action on Sugar's analysis of NDNS and the obesity strategy, and confirmed by our qualitative research

The results were truly **shocking**. Young people overwhelmingly think their diet is healthy (73%) despite the fact that their intake of sugar, fruit and veg, and fibre is not on par with (or nowhere near) the Government's daily nutrition reference intakes.



Rather worryingly, almost **9 in 10** young people think smoothies are healthy – yet **76%** of juices and smoothies would receive a red traffic light label for high levels of sugar. To put this into perspective, a typical smoothie in an average meal deal is 83% of a teen's or adult's daily allowance of free sugars.



Other key findings revealed **8 in 10** young people believe cereal bars are healthy based on misleading packaging claims which is deeply concerning considering **81%** of cereal bars would qualify for a red traffic light label.



A further **9 out of 10** young people think yoghurts are healthy despite the fact that **35%** of flavoured yoghurts would receive a red traffic light label for high sugar.<sup>2</sup>

It should be easy for young people to be healthy, but sadly that's not the case partly due to many misleading nutrition claims and ingredient 'shout-outs' health-washing our supermarket aisles. Our young campaigners simply want food and drink brands to be upfront and honest about the things they put inside their products. The food industry should take responsibility and work with Bite Back 2030 to redesign the system to protect the health and futures of millions of children, starting with removing the health halos plastered across the packaging of their high fat, salt and sugar products.

In the wake of the UK's exit from the European Union, the Government also has a clear mandate to act, rethink and improve the clarity of food labelling in this country. In this report we set out concise recommendations for Government and industry (page 30), which would incentivise reformulation and deliver more health-promoting food environments for young people.

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<sup>2</sup>Action on Sugar's analysis of the FoodSwitch UK Database



# About Bite Back 2030

Bite Back 2030 is a youth-led movement campaigning to transform the food system to put child health first. That means healthy schools, healthy screens and healthy streets for every child, no matter where they live. Our mission is to halve childhood obesity by 2030, and to close the inequality gap that sees children from the most deprived areas more than twice as likely to be living with obesity as those from the least deprived areas.

## Our partners

### About Action on Sugar

Action on Sugar is part of UK-based health focused registered charity Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (founded in 1996), dedicated to reducing dietary salt, sugar and calorie consumption to improve the health of populations in the UK and worldwide. Action on Sugar is working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government that there is strong evidence that free sugars are a major cause of obesity and have other adverse health effects, and bring about a reduction in the amount of sugars in food and drink products.

### About Livity

Livity is a creative business that works hand in hand with brands and the next generation to build the future better. They work with partners across a variety of topics from mental health, healthy food and keeping active, youth violence and online safety through to skills development and social mobility programmes.

Livity have a youth network of 5,000+ under 30-year-olds who they bring into our work, ensuring that we are youth-led in all that we do. They also offer this network opportunities that align to their mission – from paid opportunities to be involved in projects, to mentoring programmes, talent programmes, free office space and a weekly opportunities newsletter.

Uniquely in the UK creative industries, Livity measure their social impact alongside their financial reporting, with a focus on boosting young people's social and cultural capital. Their work also supports the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

# Background

## Labelling of prepacked food

All prepacked food requires a food label that displays certain mandatory information, for example the nutrition declaration and net weight. Any labelling provided must be accurate and not misleading.<sup>3</sup>

Many products also have on-pack claims. These can be nutrition claims, such as 'high in fibre' and health claims, such as 'calcium helps maintain normal bones'. These are also governed by law (more information below), but they serve more of a marketing purpose and manufacturers can pick and choose which to highlight on their packaging, despite what's really on the inside.

## What is front-of-pack nutrition labelling?

The aim of front-of-pack nutrition labels is for manufacturers to provide consumers with clear nutritional information at first glance, helping us to make a more informed choice. In the UK, the now familiar voluntary traffic light system was launched by the Department of Health and Social Care in 2013 and has been adopted by many brands, including all major retailers. However, the system is used inconsistently across product ranges, meaning that traffic lights are not always displayed and portion sizes are inconsistent.<sup>4</sup>

In July 2020, the Government launched a public consultation on front-of-pack labelling to ensure the current system is still the most effective. There are now several alternative systems to the traffic lights; many European countries for example have chosen the Nutri-Score system, while countries including Mexico, Chile and Israel have opted for warning labels on unhealthy products instead. The outcome of that consultation is still pending at the time of publication of this report.

## Why is front-of-pack labelling important?

The primary reason is an obvious one – we need to know what is in a product and what that might mean for our health. We know that labels need to be simple, and that they are more effective when consumers are familiar with them. 9 in 10 people agree that traffic light nutrition labelling helps them make informed decisions about the food they buy.<sup>5</sup> Consumers perceive products without front-of-pack labelling as healthier, even if they are nutritionally worse.<sup>6</sup> And a recent meta-analysis of research evidence into four types of nutritional labelling, including the UK's traffic light system, shows a positive effect across all types in influencing healthy purchasing choices, strengthening calls to the Government to introduce mandatory front-of-pack labelling.<sup>7</sup>

There is a secondary important benefit to front of pack labelling, which is reformulation. Evidence submitted by Sainsbury's and Asda to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee indicated that traffic light labelling increases the demand for healthier foods. This may therefore stimulate manufacturers to reformulate their products to achieve a healthier profile – and colour code – to meet this demand.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.gov.uk/guidance/food-labelling-giving-food-information-to-consumers>

<sup>4</sup>2015. The House of Commons Health Committee. Childhood obesity – brave and bold action. First report of session 2015–16. HC 465

<sup>5</sup>Diabetes UK. (2018). Public views on food labelling survey. ComRes interviewed 2,121 UK adults online, aged 18+ between 12–14th Jan 2018

<sup>6</sup>Kanter R, Vanderlee L, Vandevijvere S. Front-of-package nutrition labelling policy: global progress and future directions. *Public health nutrition*. 2018;21(8):1399–1408

<sup>7</sup>Song J, Brown MK, Tan M, MacGregor GA, Webster J, Campbell NRC, et al. (2021) Impact of color-coded and warning nutrition labelling schemes: A systematic review and network meta-analysis. *PLoS Med* 18(10): e1003765. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003765>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/joint\\_response\\_to\\_uk\\_fop\\_consultation\\_final.pdf](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/joint_response_to_uk_fop_consultation_final.pdf)

## What are nutrition and health claims?

A nutrition claim is a claim that states, suggests or implies that a food has beneficial nutritional properties, such as 'no added sugar' or 'high in fibre'. A health claim is any statement about a relationship between food and health, such as 'Vitamin C which increases iron absorption'. The use of nutrition claims and health claims in the UK is currently controlled by European Regulation (EC 1924/2006). On top of all this, retailers and manufacturers use icons such as 'Eat Well' and 'Treatwise' and have developed their own criteria with which to allow these icons.

According to the regulatory guidance neither of these claims should be used to encourage or condone excess consumption.

But our research shows that **manufacturers are misleading consumers to believe it's healthy** to eat all products with health claims, which they're doing in amounts that exceed the nutritional guidance.

A quick look back over history illustrates how this could be the case. For example, in the 1970s and 80s, studies began linking reduced chances of certain types of cancer to fibre intake. Lo and behold, Kellogg's 1984 advertising campaign in the USA highlighted the fibre content of some of its cereals, and so began increased consumer demand for fibrous cereals and granola bars.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the food industry has responded to consumers' decades-long concern over fat content with 'low fat' products, which are often highly processed and contain sugar.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence suggests that the presence of a nutrition or health claim leads consumers to ignore other nutrition information, e.g. nutrition panels or front-of-pack labels.<sup>11</sup> There is also evidence that influencing consumers' perceptions with the use of these claims can lead to overconsumption and lowering perceived energy intake.<sup>12</sup> For example, one study found that when 'reduced-fat' yoghurt was perceived as healthy, purchase intentions increased.<sup>13</sup> Another study found that participants reported viewing 'low-fat' claims as 'permission' to eat more.<sup>14</sup>

This is concerning as there are currently no rules on the types of products that are allowed to use nutrition or health claims; there are no specific regulations around whether these claims can be used on products that would get a 'red' traffic light label. In practice, this means that a consumer may reach for a chocolate bar – which may have a red traffic light label for sugar – simply owing to its 'high in protein' nutrition claim on the packaging. This opacity is compounded by the absence of mandatory traffic light labelling.

<sup>9</sup>Ippolito, P. M., & Mathios, A. D. (1991). Health Claims in Food Marketing: Evidence on Knowledge and Behavior in the Cereal Market. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 10(1), 15–32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30000249>

<sup>10</sup>Spector, T (2020) Spoon-Fed: Why almost everything we've been told about food is wrong, Vintage Digital

<sup>11</sup>Williams P. Nutrition science and policy consumer understanding and use of health claims for foods. *Nutr Rev*. 2005;63:256–64. <https://doi.org/10.1301/nr.2005.jul.256>.

<sup>12</sup>Chandon P. How package design and packaged-based marketing claims Lead to overeating. *Appl Econ Perspect Policy*. 2013;35:7–31. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aepp/ppp028>

<sup>13</sup>Mai R, Hoffmann S. How to combat the unhealthy = tasty intuition: the influencing role of health consciousness study 3. *J Public Policy Mark*. 2015;34:63–83. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.14.006>

<sup>14</sup>Chan C, Patch C, Williams P. Australian consumers are sceptical about but influenced by claims about fat on food labels. *Eur J Clin Nutr*. 2005;59:148–51. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.ejcn.1602038>

In summary, the use of health and nutrition claims creates a positive impression of a food or drink product, known as the 'health halo' effect. While the UK Government is taking steps to protect young people from harmful food and drink marketing, little attention has been paid to this particular marketing tactic. As this research demonstrates, regulating 'healthwashing' will be a necessary intervention if we are to meet the 2030 target of halving childhood obesity.

### Additional on-pack marketing tactics

The range of marketing tactics used purely on packaging is actually mind blowing, and that's before we start to think of wider promotional and advertising tactics, from billboard ads to sports sponsorship.

Cartoon characters, including licensed TV, book and film characters (e.g. the Minions) and manufacturers' own unlicensed characters (e.g. Frosties' Tony the Tiger) are a favourite way to target children. Brands also rely on celebrities such as athletes and influencers to target young people. Packaging also often includes giveaways and competition prizes.

Brand mascots and characters can increase profit and emotional connection with customers by up to 41%.<sup>15</sup> Yet a recent survey found over half of 532 food and drink products that use cartoon animations on their packaging to appeal to children, are in fact products high in fat, sugar and salt.<sup>16</sup>



Watch our  
**Mascots Anonymous**  
campaign short here



<sup>15</sup><https://www.moving-picture.com/news/where-art-plays-with-science-mpc-and-lbb-character-building-research>

<sup>16</sup>Pombo-Rodrigues S, Hashem KM, Tan M, Davies Z, He FJ, MacGregor GA. Nutrition Profile of Products with Cartoon Animations on the Packaging: A UK Cross-Sectional Survey of Foods and Drinks. *Nutrients*. 2020; 12(3):707. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12030707>

"All of us have trust issues, but I didn't expect to have trust issues with the food system too. Isn't everyone tired of the lack of transparency and honesty in the food system? Aren't we all tired of falling in the trap of believing health claims? Eating healthily should be easy, and let me tell you something - it isn't."



**Emily**

Bite Back 2030  
Youth Board

# Findings

Amidst the myriad health claims, marketing and spin, we wanted to try to understand what young people thought about their diet, versus the reality of the products they were eating. Through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, which were corroborated with NDNS data and Action on Sugar's FoodSwitch data set (See Appendix 1 for Methodology), the findings were stark.

## How healthily do young people think they're eating?

Our nationally representative survey found that nearly **three in four (73%)** young people think their diet is healthy. And yet, analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative research found that young people are in fact eating much less healthily than they think.

An interesting finding was the differences in the food and drink consumed by young people who think their diet is healthy, compared to young people who report having an unhealthy diet.

Food category	Young people who report having a healthy diet, who consumed this product the previous day (quantitative)	Young people who report having an unhealthy diet, who consumed this product the previous day (quantitative)
Fruit and vegetables	60%	33%
Fruit juice	43%	27%
Yoghurt	32%	21%
Cereal bar	21%	11%
Smoothie	15%	4%

While young people who report having a healthy diet are eating more fruit and vegetables, they are also consuming more juice, smoothies, cereal bars and yoghurts. These can be a nutritious choice, providing a source of nutrients to teenagers' diets, but some can also contain high levels of fat, sugar and salt, and not enough fibre.

## What are young people actually eating?

A typical teen diet is worlds away from recommendations around sugar, fruit and vegetables, and fibre. 11-18 year olds have, on average, over double the recommended amount of added sugar, half the recommended fibre, fruit and vegetable intakes, and are deficient in nutrients vital for growing healthy bones, brains and hearts.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-9-to-11-2016-to-2017-and-2018-to-2019>

**The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)** assesses the diet, nutrient intake and nutritional status of 11–18-year-olds in the UK, including the proportion meeting government recommendations. Results are used to monitor the progress toward diet and nutrition objectives and develop policy interventions, for example to monitor progress towards a healthy, balanced diet as depicted in the Eatwell Guide.

#### On average, 11–18 year olds in the UK:<sup>18</sup>

- Consume over twice (12.3% of energy) the recommended maximum of free sugars (5% of energy), with just 6% of teenagers below the maximum recommendations
- Consume approximately 4 teaspoons of sugar from sugar-sweetened soft drinks
- Have a tenth more saturated fat (12.6% of energy) than their daily recommended intake of 11% of energy
- Eat half the amount of fibre recommended, with only 4% meeting the recommendations of 30g
- Eat 2.7 portions of fruit and vegetables each day, with just 8% achieving their five-a-day
- Don't have enough oily fish, with only 1 in 10 reaching the recommendations
- Don't have enough minerals; a fifth of girls are below the calcium recommendations, and over half of girls are below the iron and magnesium recommendations

\* Free sugars are not from whole fruit, veg or milk. The government recommends that free sugars should not make up more than 5% of the energy (calories) you get from food and drink each day. For 11–18 year olds this is approx 30g (approx 7 teaspoons)

To give a real life example, take a lunch many people – teens and adults alike – turn to for convenience during the week, consisting of a wrap, drink and nutty snack. We found that it was common practice across major retailers including Sainsbury's, Co-op and Tesco, to include high sugar, salt and fat products and energy drinks in their meal deal offers. The below Tesco £3 meal deal lunch, which features claims about fibre, energy and plant-based, contains 24 teaspoons sugar (97g), over 3 times the daily recommendation for free sugars and the equivalent of 15 jam doughnuts!<sup>19</sup>



Note that all three products, including the own-brand wrap, do not have colour coded nutrition labels on the front-of-pack. We found front of pack labels were present more consistently on other retailer own-brand sandwich and wrap offerings. If there was front of pack labelling on this wrap, the Plant Chef Hoisin would be amber for saturated fats and sugars, and red for salt. Additionally, the Monster Mango Loco energy drink would be red for sugar, and the 'fibre' graze box would be red for both saturated fat and sugars.

<sup>18</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-9-to-11-2016-to-2017-and-2018-to-2019>

<sup>19</sup>1 tesco jam doughnut – 6.5g sugar – <https://www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/306499125>

In Sainsbury's, Grab Bag sized Doritos are included in their Meal Deal, which would attract a red traffic light and contain 18% of an adult's daily recommendation for fat.

Popular with teenagers, we believe meal deals should represent a better opportunity for health; we are therefore recommending that retailers remove unhealthy snacks and drinks from price promotions.



### Sugars – are they all the same?

- Total sugars: this refers to all types of sugars. The daily recommended intake (RI) for total sugars is 90g, of which about two thirds should come from sugars found naturally in milk, and unprocessed fruit and vegetables.
- Added sugars: this covers any sugars added to food or drinks. These sugars may be added at home or added to foods and drinks you buy. There is no RI specifically for added sugar and it is not required on the label, but it does have associated nutrition claims such as “no added sugar”. It is familiar to the public.
- Free sugars: these are all added sugars in any form; plus all sugars naturally present in fruit and vegetable juices, purees and pastes and similar products in which the structure has been broken down through processing (making the sugar ‘free’ of the plant cell wall). The RI for free sugars is 30g (about 7 teaspoons) for teens. These are the kind of sugars we need to have less of, and less frequently, as they are harmful to teeth and associated with weight gain, but are less well understood by the public.
- It is not currently possible to assess free sugars from nutrition labels, as this information is not required. However, for most processed foods, all sugars are free sugars. The exceptions are yoghurts and milk-based drinks which contain approximately 5% sugars in the form of lactose.

### Six meals a day

Both the quantitative and qualitative research also found that habitual snacking has become embedded in the eating patterns of young people, with the three main meals of breakfast, lunch and dinner supplemented with three snacking occasions mid-morning, mid-afternoon and evening. It is in these snacking windows where we see the most health claim products being consumed – cereal bars and smoothies in particular – leading to overconsumption throughout the day. The results are concerning, to say the least.

There was a trend of main meals becoming healthier as the day progressed; participants were more likely to consume home-cooked meals in the evening, while meals that are quicker to prepare were more prevalent in the morning and afternoon. However, snacking occasions were consistently less healthy throughout the day. Drinks also featured heavily: 40% of our quantitative study participants said they consume a soft drink on a school day.

The quantitative research showed that young people are most likely to eat the below food types by time of day.

Breakfast	Participants	Lunch	Participants
Breakfast cereals	90%	Sandwiches	81%
Fruit juices	64%	Crisps	48%
Cereal bars	55%	Soft drinks	47%

Afternoon snack	Participants	Dinner	Participants	Evening snack	Participants
Sweets	57%	Chips	69%	Chocolate	36%
Soft drinks	53%	Pre-prepared meal	65%	Sweets	35%
Chocolate	49%	Pudding	61%	Ice-cream	33%

There was variation based on participants' socioeconomic characteristics.

Young people in higher socioeconomic groups were more likely to consume fruit and vegetables, and less likely to consume soft drinks or chips on a school day, than young people in **lower socioeconomic** groups.

Young people in higher socioeconomic groups were also less likely to consume soft drinks, crisps, sweets or a savoury snack in the evening than young people in lower socioeconomic groups, although the numbers were still high. **This disparity is reflected in the inequalities of the wider food environment:** we know that the most deprived areas have five times as many fast food outlets as the least deprived areas,<sup>20</sup> and that young people and adults in lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to report seeing ads for unhealthy products.<sup>21</sup>

We also asked participants about which food and drink brands they like most. Our quantitative research found that the top 5 most popular brands consumed by young people in a week are (in descending order): Cadbury, Coca-Cola, Kellogg's, McDonald's, and supermarket own-brand. Of the young people that consume Kellogg's, Subway and Grenade, the majority of respondents think they are very or somewhat healthy – 79.7%, 73.3%, 72.4%, respectively.

<sup>20</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fast-food-outlets-density-by-local-authority-in-england>

<sup>21</sup>[https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/i-Spy\\_NEF.pdf](https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/i-Spy_NEF.pdf)

So how does all this translate into a typical day for a teen? We selected and analysed two examples of a reported diet by two teenagers from our qualitative research.

Each individual, and in fact each day, was very different to the next. We pulled out two examples of what might be construed as a 'higher' consumption and a 'lower' consumption day, and both still exceeded their reference intakes for some nutrients, particularly saturated fat and sugars. On both occasions the participants struggled to meet their fibre recommendations and neither met their '5-a-day'.<sup>22</sup>

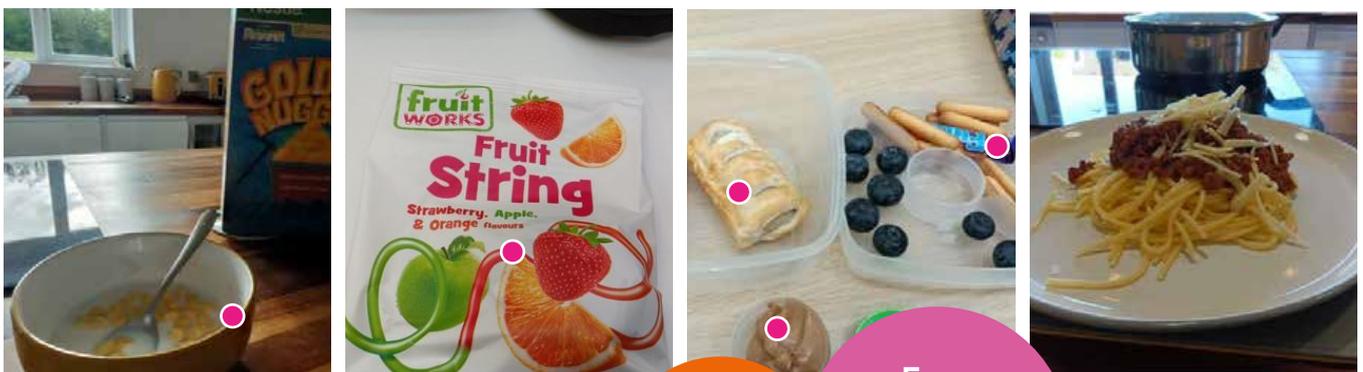
### Example food diary 1 (higher)



● = Individual food/drink/snack consumed in an eating occasion



### Example food diary 2 (lower)



● = Individual food/drink/snack consumed in an eating occasion



<sup>22</sup>Limitations: Not all food diaries appeared to be complete, and only represent a snapshot in time of one person's daily diet

When out of the house, convenience plays a key role in food decisions, but when at home, teens are likely to eat more home cooked meals and snack products chosen by parents. 'Treat' foods still very much dominated at multiple occasions throughout the day, reportedly due to convenience and taste.

Many of the products in these diaries might at first glance look like healthy options, such as a breakfast cereal or fruit string. But over the day, the sugars, fat and salt across the products chosen quickly add up. This snapshot shows just how easy it is for young people to exceed their daily recommended allowance for calories, saturated fats, sugars and salt. This outcome is not a coincidence, nor is it the result of stubborn teen dietary preferences. Teens are being drawn to less healthy products through health claims that deliberately mislead them into thinking what they're eating is part of a healthy diet.

### Why are young people eating what they're eating?

"Fruit and vegetables and salad are good for you. Anything that is low in fat and sugar is usually quite healthy." **Young participant**

"Most items that are natural or made with natural ingredients are usually a good bet." **Young participant**

There are of course a number of influences behind a young person's purchasing decision, with our quantitative research finding that taste (53%), price (35%), trust in a brand (27%) and convenience (26%) all play a crucial role. Although research exploring the importance of drivers including price and taste on dietary choice among young people is limited, these findings are reflected elsewhere too. For example, the Food Standards Authority's Food and You survey found that price is a strong driver of food choices for Gen Z.<sup>23</sup> This helps explain our qualitative research findings, which showed that young people tend to eat more healthily at home and at school, where their decision-making is more limited, and where they are less likely to be paying for what they consume.

<sup>23</sup>FSA. 'Food and You. Wave 5, 2019'. Food Standards Agency, available at <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you/food-and-you-wave-five>

While healthiness is not the most important factor, 1 in 2 participants agreed that **health and nutrition messaging** on ads, packaging and menus make them **more likely to purchase** a product.

Food labelling is absolutely driving young people's perception of whether a product is healthy or not. The quantitative research showed that 66% of participants believe 'low in sugar' or 'no added sugar' made a product healthy, followed by 63% for 'low in fat', 57% for 'contains fruit and veg', 55% for 'low in salt' and 51% for 'high in fibre'.

These findings were corroborated by our qualitative research, which included an activity on the final day where participants evaluated a series of 10 different products that had various claims on the packaging. They gave each product a score between 1 (unhealthy) and 5 (very healthy).



Products containing fruit and veg were deemed healthiest, with the smoothie product (4.9/5), orange juice (4.2/5) and vegetable crisps (3.9/5) ranked highest. Vitamin labelling on the smoothie and juice products also contributed to their high score. Products that included vegan and gluten free claims were also more likely to be perceived as healthier. For comparison, chocolate products scored lower, despite the claims on pack, as chocolate is viewed as less healthy. Brands and their marketing departments are exploiting this influence by using the elements that young people think make a healthy product to their advantage. **The reality is that all of these products would attract a red or amber traffic light label.**

"I think that these findings are so shocking. So many young people thinking that cereal bars, smoothies and yoghurts are healthy when they're actually the opposite is genuinely quite scary. I would have said I eat quite healthily but maybe I don't! Companies need to step up and be more honest and transparent with their audience, especially young people."



**Jacob**

Bite Back 2030  
Youth Board

# Examples of products

with claims despite the levels of sat fat, sugar or salt

Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Oats & Honey 5X42g



## PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Perfect on-the-go snack
- Great tasting bars with no colours or preservatives
- Packed with natural wholegrain oats and real ingredients
- Suitable for vegetarians. 100% wholegrain oats. Lactose free

REALITY

- Over a quarter sugar
- Nearly 3 teaspoons of sugar per bar
- 0.9g saturates per bar
- No traffic light labelling

Grenade Carb Killa Protein Bar Salted Peanut



## PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Marketed as Salted Peanut
- 20g protein
- 2g sugar
- 'High' protein bar

REALITY

- Nearly 10% saturates
- A third of your daily maximum allowance for saturates
- 0.31g salt per bar

## Cadbury Brunch Bar Peanut Protein 5X32g



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Marketed as a 'Brunch' bar
- Helps to maintain healthy bones
- No colours/preservatives
- Source of protein and fibre

### REALITY

- A quarter sugar
- 2 teaspoons of sugar per bar
- No traffic light labelling

## Kellogg's Strawberry Fruit Winders 6x17g



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Strawberry and pear fruit snack roll
- Marketed as an on-the-go snack
- All natural colours and flavours
- Suitable for vegetarians

### REALITY

- Over a third sugar
- 6g of sugar in just one portion
- No traffic light labelling

## Monster Mango Loco 500ml



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Marketed as mango and juiced
- Energy Drink with Inositol and B Vitamins

### REALITY

- 14 teaspoons of sugar per can
- Equivalent of nearly 200% of your daily allowance of free sugars
- Only 9% fruit juice from concentrate
- No traffic light labelling

## Innocent Strawberries & Bananas 250ml



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Packed with Natural Goodness
- A source of vitamin C & fibre
- Responsibly sourced ingredients
- Never added sugar

### REALITY

- 10g sugar per 100ml
- Equivalent of 6 teaspoons of sugar per bottle
- 83% of your daily maximum allowance for free sugars
- No traffic light labelling

## Frijj Chocolate Milk 400ml



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Made with British milk
- A source of protein, calcium and Vitamin B12
- Aligned with British Athletics

### REALITY

- 11.1% sugar
- Equivalent of 11 teaspoons per bottle
- No traffic light labelling

## Kind Caramel Almond & Sea Salt 40g



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Marketed as sea salt
- High in fibre
- Ingredients you can see and pronounce
- No artificial additives - No artificial colours, flavours or preservatives

### REALITY

- 3.2g of saturates per bar
- Nearly 1.5 teaspoons of sugar per bar
- Includes unpronounceable ingredients
- No traffic light labelling

## Kellogg's Crunchy Nut Bites Honey & Nut Flavour 375g



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Source of Fibre
- No artificial colours or flavours
- Added Goodness\*

\*Source of vitamins B1, B2, B6, B6 & B12. Vitamin B1 contributes to normal energy-yielding metabolism

### REALITY

- A third of your free sugars per 30g portion
- 27g sugar per 100g
- Amber for salt and saturates
- Only 1.5% honey

## Innocent Bubbles Sparkling Apple & Berry 330ml



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Pure pressed apples, berries grapes & mandarins with sparkling spring water & nothing else
- Contains naturally occurring sugars from fruit
- Vegan
- Tastes good, does good

### REALITY

- 20g of sugars per can
- 5 teaspoons of free sugars, or 67% of your daily maximum allowance
- No traffic light labelling

## Muller Corner Vanilla Chocolate Balls Yogurt 130g



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- No artificial preservatives, sweeteners or colours
- 'Source of Protein' logo
- Proud Sponsor of British Athletics & Athletics Ireland
- Source of Calcium

### REALITY

- Over 20g sugar per pot
- Equivalent of 5 teaspoons of sugars
- 4g saturates per portion

## Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Raisin 6x45g



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Marketed as 'Nutri-Grain'
- Kick start your day keeping you fuelled for the morning ahead
- Vitamin B12 contributes to the reduction of tiredness and fatigue
- Source of iron

### REALITY

- 18g sugar per bar – 4.5 teaspoons of sugar
- Over half your daily recommended allowance of free sugars per bar
- Glucose-fructose syrup as third ingredient, only 11% raisins

## Tropicana Sensations Multivitamin Boost Juice 850ml



### PRODUCT MARKETING CLAIMS

- Marketed as a multivitamin boost drink
- Juice of 12 Fruits with Added Vitamins C, B1, B2, B6, E & A.
- Just one serving of juice provides 1 of your 5 daily portions of fruit and veg
- A Delicious Way to Support Your Immune System
- Start Your Day with The Power of Goodness



**REALITY**

- Equivalent of over 4 teaspoons of sugar in 150ml portion
- Over half of your daily allowance of free sugars per 150ml portion

## A new craze for protein

“Protein has gone from a niche bodybuilding supplement to a mainstream obsession, and is now added to a huge range of food and drink products.”<sup>24</sup>

4 in 10 young people believe that a ‘high in protein’ claim on packaging makes a product healthier. Grenade, a British protein bar brand, was ranked third healthiest based on what participants had consumed over the previous week. In our qualitative research, bars that contain protein were deemed healthier than alternatives. Participants focused on the high protein and low carb claims on the Grenade Carb Killa bar. And while the Snickers Protein bar was ranked lower on health, it was still deemed healthier than other chocolate bars owing to the protein claim.



According to the market research firm Mintel, 6.1% of food and drink product launches in 2020 claimed to be high-protein or contain added protein, up from 3.3% in 2016. Versions of Mars, Snickers and Bounty bars with added protein are now widely available. Mondelez International, which owns Cadbury and Toblerone, acquired Grenade earlier this year, and Kellogg's acquired RXBar, another protein bar, in 2017.<sup>25</sup>

The popularity of such products is down to marketing, and more often than not, not associated with a need for people to increase their protein intake. Protein, just as claims such as ‘all natural’, has a halo effect and persuades consumers – including young people – that the product is therefore good for us. The reality can be very different. Many of these products are highly processed, and contain high levels of sugar and/or saturated fat.

<sup>24</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/food/2021/sep/15/muscles-and-methane-how-protein-became-the-food-industrys-biggest-craze>

<sup>25</sup>ibid

## Contains 2.4 portions... really? Portion Distortion

Despite all the activities around front of pack labelling, portion sizes remain varied and confusing. Research from the British Heart Foundation highlighted both the growth and inconsistency in portion size. It also found that two-thirds of the public think the Government and food industry should be doing more to make it easier for people to understand portion sizes.<sup>26</sup>

“The size of some portions has doubled, while others are so varied between different suppliers and manufacturers that trying to make comparisons is nigh on impossible.”

British Heart Foundation, 2013

We know that portion sizes influence how much we eat. Put simply, larger portions encourage us to eat more – and shape our view of what is a normal amount to eat. There is debate around whether portion sizes on-pack should represent what people actually consume or what they should consume and it's not clear which of these two types of information has a bigger influence.



A fruit juice recommended portion size

Here are a few examples of unhelpful (and unrealistic!) serving sizes:

- 16 Smarties constitute a serving size, which in practice means a small 38g Smarties tube supposedly contains 2.4 servings
- 30g constitutes one serving of Doritos, yet a Meal Deal grab bag is 48g
- A 250ml Innocent Mango & Passion Fruit Smoothie is included in a supermarket meal deal, yet the recommended daily allowance for juice is 150ml

The information that food and drink brands don't put on the front of packs is just as important as what they do put on the front. As we've seen so far in this report, brands use the misleading practice of telling consumers about the good stuff, while completely avoiding talking about the teaspoons of sugar or high levels of salt in their product.

<sup>26</sup>PORTION DISTORTION - British Heart Foundation <https://www.bhf.org.uk/files/policy-documents>

### Doing the bare minimum

The thresholds for when a product is 'red' front-of-pack are far too generous. A product has to be nearly a quarter (22.5%) sugar. So a cereal bar has to have the equivalent of over 7 teaspoons of sugar to get a red on the label. This should be revised to kick in at lower levels to incentivise companies to reduce the sugar and go below these thresholds.

Companies are also being irresponsible by getting around existing guidelines in clever ways. For example, even products that do implement front-of-pack traffic light labels are rather sneaky. Portion size thresholds only apply to foods over 100g, and to drinks over 150ml, so many fruit juices and smoothies unrealistically suggest exactly 150ml to be a portion, to avoid a red traffic light. If you can buy a 250ml bottle smoothie in a supermarket meal deal, then it is laughable to suggest you would drink only 150ml.

### So what does this mean for young people's health?

"According to the packaging, a can of Innocent Bubbles Sparkling Apple & Berry is 'Pure pressed apples, berries grapes & mandarins with sparkling spring water & nothing else'; 'contains naturally occurring sugars from fruit'; is vegan; 'Tastes good, does good.' Yet it contains **20g of sugar** per can, **two thirds (67%)** of my recommended daily maximum for free sugars, and would get a red traffic light if they put that on the packaging instead!"

**Jacob, Bite Back 2030 Youth Board member**

In a survey of over 500 different food and drink products commonly consumed by teenagers with 'health halos' driven by health, nutrition and marketing claims, in categories identified by our research as commonly consumed by teenagers, over half (57%) are high in either salt, saturated fat or sugar, and would get a red traffic light label. Looking at drinks alone, the figure rises to nearly two-thirds (62%).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Action on Sugar's analysis of NDNS and the obesity strategy, and confirmed by our qualitative research

“Tesco’s plant range had a hoisin wrap with over **5 teaspoons** of sugar and no front of pack labelling, and a Houmous Harissa Vegetable Sandwich with 8g of sugar where they did put the green traffic light on the front.” **Bite Back 2030 Youth Board member**

Almost 9 in 10 young people think smoothies are healthy, but 76% of juices and smoothies would get a red traffic light label. A typical smoothie in a meal deal is 83% of a teen’s or adult’s daily allowance of free sugars. Some 8 in 10 young people are led to believe cereal bars are healthy, but in fact 81% would get a red traffic light label! And 9 in 10 young people think yoghurts are healthy, but 35% of the flavoured yoghurts people are eating would get a red traffic light label!<sup>28</sup>

Simply put, young people are being duped into consuming too many calories, too much sugar, and insufficient fruit and vegetables.

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<sup>28</sup>Action on Sugar’s analysis of the FoodSwitch UK Database

"Just wow. It should be easy to eat healthily! It's so sad that young people such as myself are falling victim to these claims. It's time that we say we've had enough. I'm fed up of companies exploiting loopholes in the laws that control how food is promoted and branded."



**Anisah**

Bite Back 2030  
Youth Board

# Do any brands market responsibly?

At Bite Back 2030, we always want to champion examples of good practice. Retailers generally perform better than manufacturers, and this applies to their use of health and nutrition claims too. Below are examples of retailer-own label 'healthier ranges', which signpost healthier products on their shelves, based on their own (**rather vague**) internal guidelines.

## Sainsbury's



Products cannot make a health or nutrition, or a 'Better for you' claim if they have any red traffic lights (unless naturally occurring)

## Asda



Products that qualify for the 'Live Better' icon must have no red traffic lights, qualify for an EU health claim and meet category-specific criteria e.g. bread must be high fibre

## Waitrose



Products carrying the 'good health' label provide a clear nutritional benefit, and do not have any red traffic lights (unless naturally occurring)

## Co-op



Products in the 'Well & Good' range do not have any red traffic lights

## Tesco



All 'Healthy Living' branded products have controlled levels of salt, sugar, fat and saturated fat and none are red on nutritional traffic light colour coding

## Marks & Spencers



Products with an 'Eat Well' logo conform to nutrition and health claims regulations, and are in line with healthy-eating guidelines

# Recommendations

“It is **morally indefensible** for manufacturers **to mislead shoppers** into buying and eating food that looks healthy on the outside of the packet, when it isn’t healthy on the inside. We are in an epidemic of childhood obesity, and we support Bite Back 2030’s call that **this practice must end now.**”

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

Why are companies so keen to hide what’s really inside their products? Are they putting profit and competitive advantage before the health of British children? There is an opportunity for manufacturers, retailers and brands to be market leading as we all try to build back stronger, healthier and more resilient post-pandemic.

**As such we are calling on the food industry to:**

- 1** Stop making health and nutrient claims on products deemed high in fat, salt and sugar, that would receive a red traffic light label for any nutrient
- 2** Accelerate reformulation programmes and set long-term targets to increase healthfulness of product ranges (in addition to meeting salt, sugar and calorie reduction targets)
- 3** Disclose the percentage of sales that are derived from less healthy and healthier products in their annual reports
- 4** Ensure that portion sizes are standardised, realistic, clearly labelled and easy to understand – empowering consumers to make healthier choices
- 5** Ensure that meal deals represent a better opportunity for health - remove unhealthy snacks and drinks from price promotions
- 6** Ensure all products display front-of-pack traffic light labelling
- 7** Invest in creative marketing for healthier options and move away from use of mascots, celebrities and cartoon imagery on unhealthy products

## Government should:

**1** Utilise the opportunity of the UK exiting the EU to introduce a clear, mandatory labelling policy in the UK, including: declarations of free sugars; traffic light labels (or an equivalent scheme) with a review of where thresholds should be lowered; regulation to end the use of health and nutrition claims on unhealthy products; and consistent portion sizing across categories

**2** Put in place mandatory targets for reformulation for the food industry, including declarations of percentages of sales from less healthy and healthier products, as recommended in the National Food Strategy

Based on this new evidence (and report), Bite Back 2030 is asking food industry giants to acknowledge the role they have to play in child health, #DontHideWhatsInside and adopt a more responsible marketing behaviour, based on the above call to arms. It shouldn't be about gaming the system and exploiting the regulatory loopholes. Instead, the food industry should be taking a serious look at how they can reformulate their products and be transparent about what's in them.

Also, as integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations into investment analysis and the calculation of a company's value become more prevalent, it will become increasingly important (especially for food and drink manufacturers) to provide units of measurement for investment decisions on subjective issues such as, for example, the amount of healthier products they produce.

As a nation we have an opportunity, post Brexit, to be bold and visionary with food labelling and marketing at the business and government level. The next generation will thank you for it but we must act NOW.

# Call to Arms

**Go to <https://donthidewhatsinside.biteback2030.com/> to join the movement, speak truth to industry and put child health at the heart of our food system.**

# Appendix

## How we're defining healthy

We need to be able to define what constitutes 'healthy' and what doesn't to food companies, however as 'healthiness' isn't black and white, we have several options to define healthfulness available to us:

- **Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM)** classifies foods on negative nutrients (saturated fats, sugars and salt) and positive nutrients (fruit and vegetables, fibre and protein) and defines food as HFSS (high in saturated fats, salt and sugar) and Non-HFSS. This is not information readily available from the label.
- **NOVA - ultra-processed foods (UPFs)** are defined by a classification system called NOVA, and usually contain ingredients that you wouldn't add when cooking homemade food, or recognise, as many will be chemicals, colourings, sweeteners and preservatives. This is not a system currently used in the UK and is not readily available from the label.
- **Traffic light labelling** - The Department of Health and Social Care's traffic light labelling system will tell you whether a food has high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) amounts of fat, saturated fats, sugars and salt. There are thresholds by 100g or 100ml (allowing for direct within category comparison) and also includes maximum amounts for large portions (the 'portion size threshold'). This is information readily available from the label. NB This is also the tool many retailers use to classify the 'healthfulness' of their products for their 'healthy' ranges.

For this research, we have used 'Traffic Light Labelling' as a proxy to define healthfulness – i.e. if a food or drink would get a red traffic light for saturated fats, sugars or salt, then it is unhealthy/less healthy. We have conducted a category-by-category analysis to confirm the Traffic Light Label criteria are closely correlated with the Nutrient Profile Model. All the products in the 'claims' survey are likely to be categorised by the NOVA system as 'ultra-processed'.

- **Unhealthy / less healthy** – refers to food and drinks that would get a red traffic light label for being high in saturated fats, sugar and salt, and are highly processed.
- **Healthier** – this refers to all food and drinks that would not get a red traffic light for being high in saturated fats, sugar and salt, but are still likely to be amber and/or highly processed.
- **Healthy** – this refers to foods and drinks that would get a green traffic light, are less processed, and are generally nutrient-rich.

## Analysis of food categories included in the Tackling Obesity advertising policy

We collected data from the 19 food and drink categories included in the Tackling Obesity advertising policy. We used purposeful selection based where possible on best-selling and well-known brands, with a particular focus on claims.

Data was obtained online from 3 major retailers (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda) and popular out of home chains, and full nutritional information as well as any nutrition or health claim mentioned on the website was recorded, for foods that were currently on the market. Food and drink products mentioned in the qualitative data were also included in the dataset where possible.

Products were categorised as high, medium or low in saturated fats, sugars and salt in accordance with the Department of Health's guidance on front of pack labelling (see following slides for criteria).

Any nutritional or health claim was recorded. These include:

- Vegetarian/vegan
- Free from artificial colours flavours or preservatives
- Free from hydrogenated fat
- High in fibre/protein
- No added salt/sugar
- % less or reduced sugar/salt
- Low in sugar/salt
- Free from sweeteners
- Contains naturally occurring sugars
- Made with/contains wholegrain
- Any mention of vitamins or minerals
- Other e.g. gluten free, light, sustainable, 1 of your 5 a day etc.

Data was collected for a total of 577 food and 111 drinks.

## Food traffic light labeling criteria

Criteria for 100g of food (whether or not it is sold by volume)

Text	LOW <sup>8</sup>	MEDIUM	HIGH	
Colour code	Green	Amber	Red	
			>25% of RIs	>30% of RIs
Fat	≤ 3.0g/100g	> 3.0g to ≤ 17.5g/100g	> 17.5g/100g	> 21g/portion
Saturates	≤ 1.5g/100g	> 1.5g to ≤ 5.0g/100g	> 5.0g/100g	> 6.0g/portion
(Total) Sugars	≤ 5.0g/100g	> 5.0g to ≤ 22.5g /100g	> 22.5g/100g	> 27g/portion
Salt	≤ 0.3g/100g	> 0.3g to ≤ 1.5g/100g	>1.5g/100g	>1.8g/portion

**Note:** Portion size criteria apply to portions/serving sizes greater than 100g

## Drink traffic light labeling criteria

Criteria for drinks per 100ml

Text	LOW <sup>a</sup>	MEDIUM	HIGH	
Colour code	Green	Amber	Red	
			>12.5% of RIs	>15% of RIs
Fat	≤ 1.5g/100ml	> 1.5g to ≤ 8.75g/100ml	> 8.75g/100ml	>10.5g/portion
Saturates	≤ 0.75g/100ml	> 0.75g to ≤ 2.5g/100ml	> 2.5g/100ml	> 3g/portion
(Total) Sugars	≤ 2.5g/100ml	> 2.5g to ≤ 11.25g/100ml	> 11.25g/100ml	> 13.5g/portion
Salt	≤ 0.3g/100ml	>0.3g to ≤0.75g/100ml	> 0.75g/100ml	> 0.9g/portion

**Note:** Portion size criteria apply to portions/serving sizes greater than 100ml

Reference intakes (%RI on the nutrition label) show you the maximum amount of calories and nutrients you should eat on average in a day. They are not targets, so you should be aiming for less than the stated amount. They relate to the general population and individual requirements may vary. Daily reference intakes for adults are:

Units	Reference Intake (RI)
Energy	8,400kJ/2,000kcal
Total fat	less than 70g
Saturated fats	less than 20g
Carbohydrate	260g
Total sugars	90g
Free sugars	30g <sup>29</sup>
Protein	50g
Fibre	30g
Salt	less than 6g

<sup>29</sup>Free sugars are all added sugars in any form; all sugars naturally present in fruit and vegetable juices, purees and pastes and similar products in which the structure has been broken down; all sugars in drinks (except for dairy-based milks); and lactose and galactose added as ingredients. It is not possible to assess free sugars from the nutrition label, as this information is not required to be provided, however for most processed foods – all sugars are free sugars. The exceptions are yoghurts and milk-based drinks

## Qualitative and quantitative research methodology

A mixed method of qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to form this research. In addition, Action on Sugar analysed the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) and food categories included in the Tackling Obesity advertising policy.

## Quantitative approach

A quantitative survey was carried out on 1,000 13–19-year-olds in England. The survey was conducted online, with each participant asked a total of 10 questions that were formed from a combination of multiple choice, open-ended, matrix, Likert scale and ranking questions. All participants were asked the same 10 questions, with the questions being set by researchers, with input from the quantitative partner. The data was analysed through cross-tabulation, identifying patterns and trends in the data overall, as well as segmenting the data by age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

A screening process was followed to ensure that anybody who did not fit the age profile was screened out, with all under 18 participants required to be opted into the research by their parents/guardians.

Respondents were recruited via the quantitative survey partners panel. Quotas were set to ensure that representation was achieved within the desired age range. The remainder of the recruitment used a natural fallout approach to ensure national representation. Participants were incentivised to take part in the survey via a process of prize points. Through completing different surveys participants gain points which they can later redeem against a range of different prizes in voucher form.

Members of the quantitative survey partners panel are recruited “by-invitation-only”. Upon enrolment to the panel, participants provide extensive profile dimensions allowing targeting of specific audiences for individual research projects. This information is verified by the quantitative partner as far as possible via referrals, wealth registers, IP addresses. Panel members then go through another validation process every time they try to take a survey.

The panel is continually updated to maintain an accurate profile and recruitment is continued through targeted marketing campaigns making sure the composition of the panel represents the wider audience.

All 1,000 of our participants were recruited from this panel, with high confidence that they meet the audience requirements that Bite Back 2030 and Action on Sugar set out in the recruitment brief.

The quantitative survey partner monitors data to remove any ‘career respondents’. They pay special interest to any respondents who are seen to be completing surveys at speed or are entering contradictory data. Data from such respondents is removed from the research. Respondents are scored on things such as the quality of their responses, the speed they fill out surveys, the frequency they engage with us and the consistency of their answers.

## Qualitative approach

The quantitative research was followed up with qualitative research, using a digital ethnography approach through the use of a week-long mobile diary with 8 13–19-year-olds. The aim was to gain a view of what food and drink they bought and consumed across the week, and the reason behind why they were purchasing or consuming these products. We also ran two tasks at the end of the week to gain an understanding into how healthy they felt their diet had been over that week, and to test a series of food and drink products with a variety of health claims on their packaging to see how healthy participants felt these products were and why.

Responses to tasks included:

- Photos of food and drink consumed over 7 days, with a timestamp of when it was consumed
- Photos of food and drink bought over 7 days, with a timestamp of when it was bought
- A 'healthiness' ranking of their diet across the week
- Response to 10 images of different food and drinks with various health claims on their packaging

Two age groups were used to analyse the data collected – 13 to 15 years and 16 to 19 years split equally with 4 in each group. Both groups were then set the same tasks, using Indeemo as a platform to both set tasks and review all responses.

Researchers analysed all content through a combination of thematic and narrative analysis, looking for trends and themes in the content shared. Participants were recruited through a market research recruitment partner using a recruitment brief, with quotas set for age and gender, and stipulating the need for a representative sample to be achieved across the other areas. Participants were incentivised to take part in the qualitative research through a financial incentive of £175.00.

## Methodology for example food diaries

Livity obtained snapshots of a typical diet from 8 teenagers aged 13–18. Data was captured by the individuals taking photos (dated) of food that they ate each day. This data was shared with Action on Sugar, and then a select number of participants with the most complete food diaries were chosen and their data compiled into food diaries for each day.

Nutritional data was obtained from Action on Sugar's extensive FoodSwitch UK dataset of food and drinks typically consumed by teenagers (as confirmed by the National Diet and Nutrition Survey, and the Government's Childhood Obesity Plan), using the participants' photos to confirm the brand, and where possible, portion sizes. If no portion sizes were given, then these were estimated based on the information given. If the food or drink in question was not included in Action on Sugar's dataset, then information was obtained from online retailers and added to the dataset.

Where brand names were not given or visible, or a product was made from scratch (e.g. home cooked meals), then foods were matched with the nearest equivalent on Action on Sugar's dataset. This helped establish the calories, fat, saturated fat, sugars, fibre and salt typically consumed in a day, and compared to established reference intakes.



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time and support**

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