

Report: Breakfast cereals with packaging that may appeal to children.

Conducted in January - February 2020.

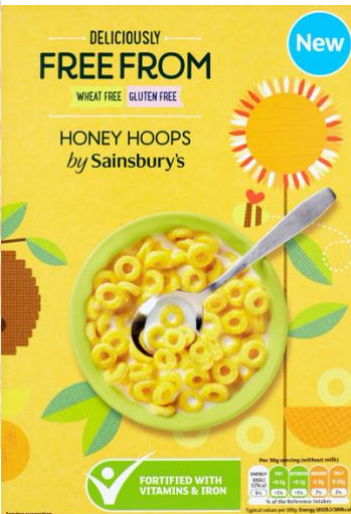


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Introduction

Breakfast cereals can be a highly nutritious breakfast choice, providing a good source of energy, fibre and key vitamins and minerals to the diet, however it can also be a deceiving choice, with many containing excessive levels of free sugars, salt and saturated fat.

The latest NDNS data (2008 - 2014) found breakfast cereals contribute 6% to the total energy intake of 1.5-10yrs and 4% of 11-18yr olds, contributing 6% of free sugars in 1.5-3yrs and 8% in 4-10yr olds.

Food and drink manufacturers and retailers have been using cartoon characters and animations on packaging to attract children, leading them to 'pester' their parents into buying these types of cereals. Currently, foods high in fat, salt and sugar, according to the UK Nutrient Profiling Model, cannot be advertised before, during and after programmes commissioned for or likely to appeal to children, and in other media i.e online, that appeals to children or where children make up 25% of the audience¹. However despite studies showing that young children prefer branded food over identical unbranded options, these restrictions do not apply to packaging².

In 2019, Action on Sugar and Action on Salt conducted a survey for the Food Foundation's 'Broken Plate Report' finding 49% of breakfast cereals with child friendly packaging were high in sugar, 86% were high or medium in salt, and 48% were low in fibre. This 2020 survey follows on to see if much has changed.

Method

Action on Salt and Action on Sugar visited 9 major supermarkets; Aldi, Asda, Lidl, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose and Partners, and The Co-Operative, between January and February 2020 (Iceland was excluded as they do not produce their own cereals). Photographic stills of all breakfast cereals available in the retailer cereal aisle, and their nutritional information tables, were obtained and inputted into a food database. Products were checked against data from last year's report. Where products were not available in store at time of collection, data was obtained from online sources (retailer/manufacturer websites), with the exception of Aldi, Lidl and Marks & Spencer, as they do not provide information online. The data then underwent inclusion and exclusion criteria for what would be deemed 'child friendly packaging' based on previous Action on Sugar and Action on Salt surveys and other literature³.

¹ Introducing further advertising restrictions on TV and online for products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) HM Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/further-advertising-restrictions-for-products-high-in-fat-salt-and-sugar>

² Hastings G. et al, 2003, Review of research on the effects of food promotion to children, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency http://www.researchgate.net/publication/295704194_Review_of_research_on_the_effects_of_food_promotion_to_children

³ Matthew A. Lapierre et al. 2017, Child-directed and nutrition-focused marketing cues on food packaging: links to nutritional content. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Child-directed-and-nutrition-focused-marketing-cues-Lapierre-Brown/701161c818f0fe101b0f76383a94c469bb9e3be5>

<p>Inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Child friendly imagery (such as cartoon characters) B. Child friendly style (such as bright colours, animated) C. Child friendly brand character (such as Tony the Tiger) D. Child friendly font (such as balloon letters and child friendly fronts) E. Child friendly media partnerships (such as Disney) F. Child friendly offers (such as a free game) G. Child themed language (such as ‘made for kids’) H. Child friendly activities (such as wordsearches on the back of pack) <p>Exclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Animations that are part of company logos B. Non child-themed lifelike drawings (such as pencil like drawings or sketches) C. Duplicates of the same product, in but in different packaging sizes

Figure 1.0 - Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Out of 501 cereals available in retail, 120 products met the inclusion criteria, and were analysed to note how many products were high, medium, or low in sugar, salt, and saturated fat using the Department of Health’s front of pack colour coded nutrition guidelines⁴. In addition to this, a scoring system was created for fibre based on last year’s report. Comparisons between cereals collected in the 2019 report have been made, where possible.

	Low	Medium	High
Colour Code	Green	Amber	Red
Fat	≤3.0g/100g	>3.0g to ≤17.5g/100g	>17.5g/100g
Saturates	≤1.5g/100g	>1.5g to ≤5.0g/100g	>5.0g/100g
(Total) Sugars	≤5.0/100g	>5.0g to ≤22.5g/100g	>22.5g/100g
Salt	≤0.3g/100g	>0.3g to ≤1.5g/100g	>1.5g/100g
Fibre	≥10g/100g	≥5g to <10g/100g	<5g/100g

Table 1.0 - Criteria for 100g of food

⁴ Guide to creating a front of pack (FOP) nutrition label for pre-packed products sold through retail outlets https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fop-guidance_0.pdf



Results

A total of 120 breakfast cereals met the inclusion criteria.

Sugar

Over 1/3 of the cereals were deemed high (red) in sugar, an improvement from nearly half of the cereals surveyed in the 2019 report. The average sugar content also reduced by 3g/100g between the 2019 and 2020 report from 21.4g/100g to 18.4g/100g.

37% (44/120 products) are deemed high (red) in sugar.

54% (65/120 products) are medium (amber)

9% (11/120 products) are low (green)

Average sugar content of cereals reported in 2019 was 21.4g/100g and 2020 was 18.4g/100g

In the 2019 report (using Nov 2018 data): 49% (38/77 products) were high in sugar, 48% (37/77) medium and 3% (2/77) were low.

Top 10 Highest Sugar Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Sugars Per 100 (g)	Sugars Per Serve* (g)
Malt O Meal Marshmallow Mateys	30	41	12
Kellogg's Frosties	30	37	11
Morrisons Choco Crackles	30	32.1	9.6
Tesco Choco Snaps	30	32.1	9.6
Asda Choco Snaps	30	32	9.6
Aldi Harvest Morn Honey & Nut Clusters with Milk Chocolate	45	30	13
Nature's Path Choco Chimps	30	30	9
Aldi Harvest Morn Choco Pillows	40	30	12
Sainsbury's Choco Hazelnut Squares	30	29.7	8.9
Kellogg's Krave Chocolate Hazelnut	30	29	8.7

*Serving size on pack

Top 10 Lowest Sugar Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Sugars Per 100 (g)	Sugars Per Serve* (g)
Shredded Wheat Bitesize	40	0.7	0.3
Morrisons Super Smooth Porridge	40	1	0.4
MULTI PACK Quaker Kids Porridge Mix-Ups Choco Porridge Combos 9X30g AVERAGE	30	1.6	0.5
MULTI PACK Quaker Kids Porridge Mix-Ups Strawberry Porridge Combos 9X30g AVERAGE	30	2	0.6
Troo Granola Chocolate with Orange	45	2.3	1.1
Troo Granola Super Seedy with Calming Ginger	45	2.3	1.1
Rude Health Fruity Bircher	30	2.9	9.6
Troo Happy Porridge with Flaxseed Omega 3s and Uplifting Cinnamon	50	3.3	1.6
Troo Calm Porridge +	50	3.5	1.7
Troo Energise Porridge with Chocolate	50	3.8	1.9

*Serving size on pack

Salt

'Malt O Meal Marshmallow Mateys' were the only cereal in both the 2019 and 2020 survey that was high in salt, and actually increased in salt from 1.6g/100g to 1.7g/100g. Otherwise, cereals have, overall, reduced their salt content with 4 in 10 now low in salt, compared to 1 in 10 in 2019.

1% (1/120 products) are deemed high (red)

58% (70/120 products) are medium (amber)

41% (49/120 products) are low (green)

Average salt content of cereals reported in 2019 was 0.54g/100g and 2020 was 0.45g/100g

In the 2019 report (using Nov 2018 data): 1% (1/77 products) were considered high in salt, 84% (65/77) medium, and 14% (11/77) were low.

Top 10 Highest Salt Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Salt Per 100 (g)	Salt Per Serve* (g)
Malt O Meal Marshmallow Mateys	30	1.7	0.51
Kellogg's Froot Loops	30	1.13	0.34
Kellogg's Corn Flakes 250g	30	1.13	0.34
Kellogg's Krave Chocolate Hazelnut 375g	30	1.1	0.33
Kellogg's Rice Krispies 340g	30	1	0.3
Nestle Golden Grahams 375g	30	0.98	0.29
Nature's Path Organic Leapin Lemurs Peanut Butter & Chocolate Cereal 284	30	0.97	0.29
Kellogg's Krave Milk Chocolate 375g	30	0.95	0.29
Aldi Harvest Morn Craze Milk Chocolate	40	0.94	0.38
Lidl Crownfield Rice Snaps 500g	30	0.88	0.26

*Serving size on pack

Top 10 Lowest Salt Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Salt Per 100 (g)	Salt Per Serve* (g)
Bear Cocoa Alpha Bites	30	0	0
Bear Multigrain Alpha Bites 350g	30	0	0
Rude Health Honey Spelt Puffs	30	0	0
Morrisons Super Smooth Porridge	40	0	0
Honey Monster Wheat Puffs 520g	30	0.01	0.01
Rainforest Food Bambeanies Super Crispies 350g	30	0.02	0.01
Aldi Harvest Morn Choco Pillows 500g	40	0.03	0.01
Rainforest Foods Bambeanies Super Cacao Crispies 350g	30	0.03	0.01
Troo Energise Porridge with Chocolate 400g	50	0.03	0.02
Troo Calm Porridge +	50	0.03	0.02

*Serving size on pack

Saturated Fat

There has been little change in the amount of saturated fat in cereals, with the majority classed as green (low), however there has been a slight increase in the number of cereals classed as medium (1 in 10 vs 2 in 10) and a slight decrease in the number of cereals classed as low (8 in 10 vs 7 in 10).

2% (2/120 products) are deemed high (red)

22% (26/120 products) are medium (amber)

77% (92/120 products) are low (green)

Average saturated fat content of cereals reported in 2019 was 1.2g/100g and 2020 was 1.3g/100g

In the 2019 report (using Nov 2018 data): 3% (2/77) were considered high in saturated fat, 13% (10/77) medium, and 84% (65/77) were low.

Top 10 Highest Saturated Fat Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Saturated fat Per 100 (g)	Saturated fat Per Serve* (g)
Lidl Crownfield Milk Choco Pillows	30	5.2	1.6
Sainsbury's Choco Hazelnut Squares	30	5.1	1.5
Aldi Harvest Morn Craze Milk Chocolate	40	4.5	1.8
Aldi Harvest Morn Honey & Nut Clusters with Milk Chocolate	45	4.5	2
Aldi Harvest Morn Choco Pillows 500g	40	4.2	1.7
Lizis Adventurers Banana Granola	30	4.1	1.2
Asda FreeFrom Gluten Free Choco Squares 300g	30	4	1.2
Kellogg's Krave Milk Chocolate 375g	30	4	1.2
Tesco Pillows with Choco - Nut Filling	30	4	1.2
Kellogg's Krave Chocolate Hazelnut 375g	30	4	1.2

*Serving size on pack

Top 10 Lowest Saturated Fat Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Saturated fat Per 100 (g)	Saturated fat Per Serve* (g)
Nature's Path Organic Leapin Lemurs Peanut Butter & Chocolate Cereal 284	30	0	0
Lidl Crownfield Frosted Flakes 500g	30	0.1	0.1
Kellogg's Frosties	30	0.1	0.03
Aldi Harvest Morn Crisp Rice	30	0.2	0.1
Sainsburys Deliciously FreeFrom Rice Pops 300g	30	0.2	0.1
Tesco FreeFrom Rice Snaps 300g	30	0.2	0.1
Kellogg's Corn Flakes 250g	30	0.2	0.1
Lidl Crownfield Rice Snaps 500g	30	0.2	0.1
Sainsbury's Multigrain Hoops 375g	30	0.2	0.1
Sainsburys Deliciously FreeFrom Honey Hoops 325g	30	0.2	0.1

*Serving size on pack

Fibre

Fibre has been the selling point for cereals for a long time, an important part of our diet with many of us consuming too little. However it's important to ensure the fibre we consume doesn't come from cereals high in sugar. Our survey found cereals that are high in fibre but lower, and even low, in sugar that popular sugary brands. Nearly 4 in 10 cereals with packaging that appeals to children were low in fibre, compared to 1 in 10 that were high in fibre.

38% (45/120 products) are deemed low in fibre (red)

48% (58/120 products) are medium (amber)

13% (15/120 products) are high in fibre (green)

Average fibre content of cereals reported in 2019 was 5.1g/100g and 2020 was 6.3g/100g.

2 products have no fibre information available online in 2020

In the 2019 report (using Nov 2018 data): 37 out of 77 products (48%) were considered low in fibre, 35 medium (45%), and 5 were high (6%)

Top 10 Highest Fibre Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Fibre Per 100 (g)	Fibre Per Serve* (g)
Morrisons FreeFrom Rice Pops 300g	30	0.4	0.1
Morrisons FreeFrom Honey Hoops	30	0.9	0.3
Sainsburys Deliciously FreeFrom Honey Hoops 325g	30	1.4	0.5
Tesco Pillows with Milk Chocolate Filling 375g	30	1.5	0.5
Tesco Rice Snaps 375g	30	1.6	0.5
Asda Rice Snaps 340g	30	1.6	0.5
Morrisons Rice Crackles	30	1.6	0.5
Asda Choco Squares	30	1.6	0.5
Lidl Crownfield Rice Snaps 500g	30	1.7	0.5
Tesco Frosted Flakes 500g	30	1.9	0.6

*Serving size on pack

Top 10 Lowest Fibre Cereals with Child Friendly Packaging

Product Name	Serving Size* (g)	Fibre Per 100 (g)	Fibre Per Serve* (g)
Troo Granola Chocolate with Orange 350g	45	19.7	8.9
Troo Granola Super Seedy with Calming Ginger 350g	45	19.7	8.9
Troo Happy Porridge with Flaxseed Omega 3s and Uplifting Cinnamon 400g	50	17	8.5
Troo Calm Porridge +	50	16.7	8.4
Troo Energise Porridge with Chocolate 400g	50	16.2	8.1
Aldi Harvest Morn Golden Puffs 375g	40	15	6.1
Lidl Crownfield Malt Wheaties 625g	30	13.1	3.9
Shredded Wheat Bitesize 500g	40	13	5
Nestle The Original Shreddies	40	12	5
Aldi Harvest Morn Multi Grain Hoops 375g	30	12	3.7

*Serving size on pack

Examples of healthier options

Only 3 products meeting the inclusion criteria had a green label for sugar, salt, saturated fat and fibre combined:

- Troo Calm Porridge +
- Troo Happy Porridge with Flaxseed Omega 3s and Uplifting Cinnamon
- Shredded Wheat Bitesize

An additional 8 products that met the inclusion criteria had a green label for both sugar and salt, but not saturated fat:

- Troo Energise Porridge with Chocolate
- Multi-pack Quaker Kids Porridge Mix-Ups Choco Porridge Combos
- Multi-pack Quaker Kids Porridge Mix-Ups Strawberry Porridge Combos
- Rude Health Fruity Bircher
- Troo Granola Chocolate with Orange
- Troo Granola Super Seedy with Calming Ginger
- Fruit Bowl Banana Wheat Biscuits
- Morrisons Super Smooth Porridge

Breakfast cereals surveyed with the biggest progress in reformulation per nutrient between 2019 and 2020:

- Aldi Harvest Morn MultiGrain Hoops increased in fibre by 4.6g/100g moving from an amber to a green label
- Asda Multigrain Hoops decreased in salt by 0.5g/100g moving from an amber to a green label
- Asda Choco Hoops, Tesco Choco Hoops and Morrisons Choco Hoops all decreased in saturated fat by 0.4g/100g
- Sainsbury's Frosted Flakes decreased in sugar by 7.1g/100g

Direct Comparison of Products Between 2019 and 2020

This 2020 report includes 120 cereals that meet the inclusion criteria, compared to 77 products with similar inclusion criteria in the 2019 report (breakfast cereals collected in November 2018). The increase of 43 products from last year could be down to numerous factors including, but not limited to, new product development, a broader inclusion criteria or more availability in store at time of collection.

Out of the 77 products collected in 2018 for the 2019 report, 56 were also included in the 2020 report. Every effort was made to collect comprehensive data for direct comparisons over the years, but unfortunately we were not able to collect data for all products. This could be due to a number of reasons; they may have been out of stock on the day of collection, not available in that particular store, or no longer in production. Where possible, if data was missing then further data collection was carried out online, but there are certain limitations to this, namely that some retailers do not provide nutrition information online. Of those that were included in both surveys, improvements in nutritional quality were made in some breakfast cereals:

- The average fibre content per 100g was 5.1g in 2019 and 5.4g in 2020 (6% increase)
- The average salt content per 100g was 0.59g in 2019 and 0.54g in 2020 (4% decrease)
- The average saturated fat content per 100g was 1.25g in 2019 and 1.23g in 2020 (2% decrease)
- The average sugar content per 100g was 21.2g in 2019 and 20.7g in 2020 (2% decrease)

2 products have had a change in packaging and no longer meet the inclusion criteria, therefore they have not been included in the report:

- Sainsbury's Puffed Wheat - no change in nutritional content (already low in salt, sugar and saturated fat)
- Kellogg's Crunchy Nut Peanut Butter Clusters - a reduction in saturated fat content by 1.5g per 100g

A note on retailers removing cartoon characters:

Asda, Aldi and Lidl all made statements to say they were removing cartoon characters from cereal packaging between February and April. Data collection for this survey was carried out before these changes were put in place. Due to current government restrictions on movement, we are unable to determine if this would have an impact on our findings. However, it is not enough for retailers and manufacturers to remove cartoon characters; the resulting design must not be attractive to children, otherwise it defeats the object.

Conclusion

Cereals with packaging that may appeal to children can not only promote ‘pester power’ but can also mislead parents into thinking they may be healthier than the adult varieties. It’s easy to understand why cereal is the go to choice for breakfast; it is quick, easy and when chosen wisely, nutritious and filling. However, with such a wide range of cereals on the market, how easy is it for parents to choose the best option for their child?

Efforts are being made to make breakfast cereals more nutritious for children, evident in the increase of the number of breakfast cereals available with green labels on front of pack for salt, sugar and, theoretically, fibre compared to last year’s report. In addition to this, of the 56 breakfast cereals that were included in both the 2019 and 2020 report, 11 increased in fibre (20%), 11 decreased in salt (20%), 8 decreased in saturated fat (14%) and 12 decreased in sugar (21%).

There is still room for improvement however, with only three cereals with child friendly packaging high in fibre, and low in salt, sugar and saturated fat.

Retailers Asda, Co-op, Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Lidl and Aldi have either removed or announced their removal of cartoon characters from their packaging since the 2019 report. Whilst this is a major step forward by the retailers, it is worthwhile remembering why this is so important, which is to stop pester power and to prevent parents from thinking the product is better for their child. With this in mind, when the retailers remove cartoon characters, we want to see the packaging in line with their other ‘adult’ ranges with simple packaging, that doesn’t attract children. Unfortunately, from what we have seen thus far, whilst cartoons have been removed, their styles are still much more animated and child friendly than their other lines, showing children as the clear target audience.

About us

Action on Salt and Action on Sugar are groups concerned with salt and sugar and its effects on health, supported by 24 expert scientific members. Action on Salt and Action on Sugar are successfully working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high salt and sugar diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of salt and sugar in processed foods as well as added to cooking, and at the table.