



CHILDREN TRICKED

Junk food disguised to appear healthy

CHILDREN are being conned by food companies who are making fatty and sugary foods appear to be healthy, an Adelaide study suggests.

Some of Australia's most popular brands, including Kellogg's and Nestle, have been accused of making food that appeals to children look healthier than it actually is, the Flinders University study shows.

Researchers, led by lecturer Kaye Mehte, found 157 products on a major supermarket chain's shelves with packaging designed to appeal to children through the use of cartoons, competitions and give-aways.

More than three-quarters of these products were deemed to be unhealthy, because they are high in fat and sugar.

However, more than half of them had prominent nutrition claims on the packaging, boasting that the product is, for example, "99% fat free",



"high in calcium" or has "no artificial colours", they found.

"This has the potential to mislead and confuse children as well as parents who would be more inclined to purchase products carrying claims about health and nutrition", Dr Mehte said.

Jane Martin, executive manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition said that "using these techniques to attract children to unhealthy food at a time when childhood obesity is at record levels is simply unethical".

A Nestle spokeswoman denied the company misled children or made unhealthy food appear to be healthy. A Kellogg's spokesman said products had daily intake guide-

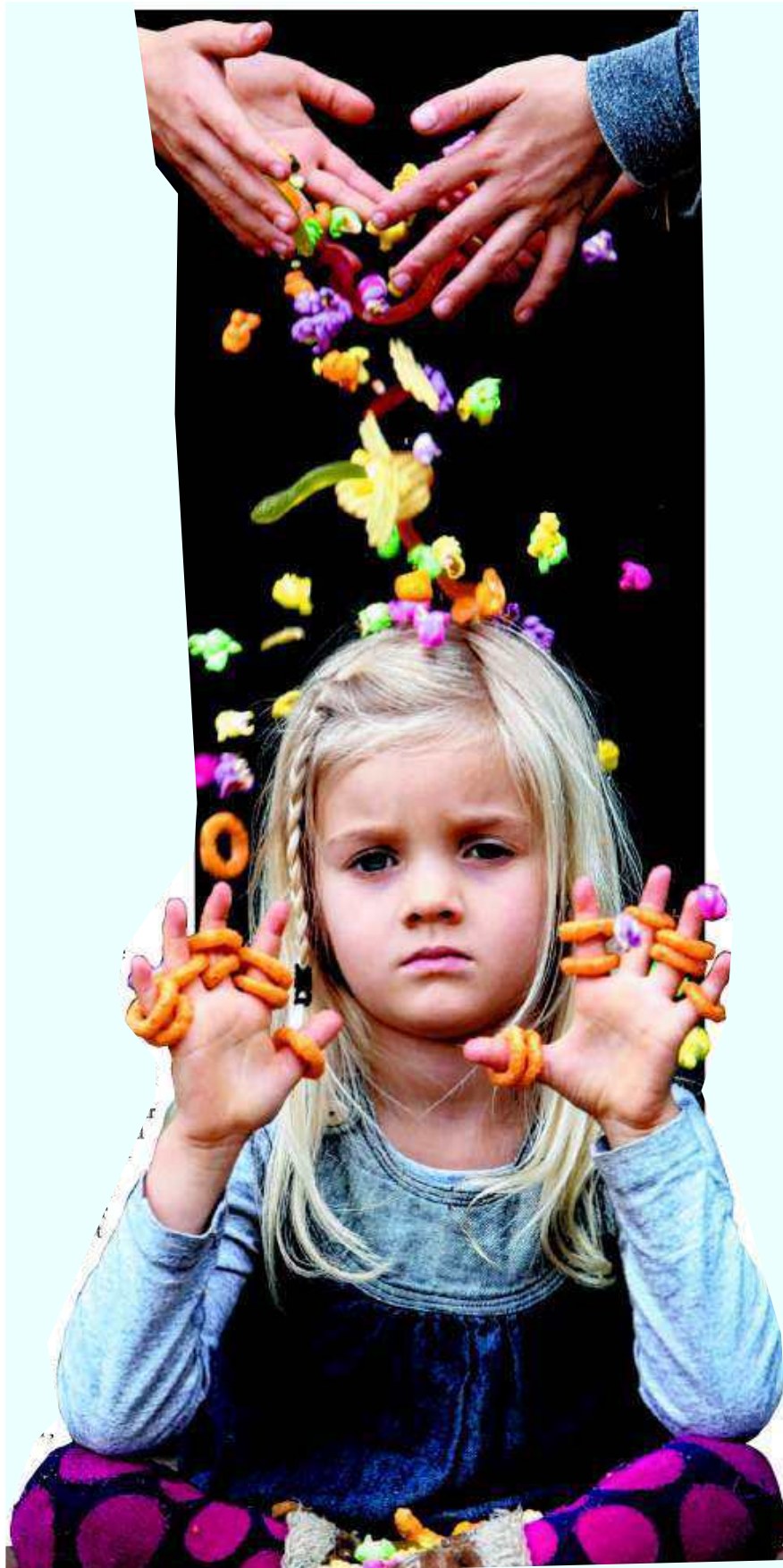
lines which show the amount of sugar, salt, fat, sodium and kilojoules per serving on the front of the packs.

Adelaide mother-of-three Marianne Organ said peer pressure and hidden additives in junk food targeted at children made it difficult for parents to pack healthy lunchboxes.

"It's an ongoing war between parents and children, but it shouldn't be that way," she said. "It can be hard for children to accept something is not good for them when it is advertised as being healthy."

She said it was getting harder as her children, aged 4, 6 and 7, grew up.





FALSE PRETENCES: Youngster Charlotte shows her disappointment as she is showered with junk food at West Beach yesterday.

Picture: MATT TURNER