



Kids are sweet enough.

REFORMS TO **REDUCE HARMFUL SUGARS** IN COMMERCIAL FOODS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (6 TO 36 MONTHS)

Key Messages

- Foods that are developed for infants and toddlers should promote good health and good eating habits, setting the foundation for a healthy future.
- Many commercial infant and toddler foods do not represent optimal nutrition for our youngest children – the processed food industry uses harmful sugar ingredients in these foods.
- Government must protect the health of our youngest Australians by regulating to ensure that all commercial infant and toddler foods are of high nutritional quality and meet strong, evidence-based standards on composition.
- Harmful sugars should not be used in infant and toddler foods, with limited specific exceptions.

Commercially available infant and toddler foods should promote good health and good dietary habits

All children deserve the best start in life, ensuring they can grow and develop in the healthiest way possible. The first three years of life are a critical opportunity to support and encourage healthy dietary habits and good nutritionⁱ and to prevent overweight and obesity and other diet related non-communicable diseasesⁱⁱ. It is also a period in which the palate is developed, and lifelong tastes, habits and food preferences are establishedⁱⁱⁱ.

Despite this, less than one in five 2-3-year-old children eat the recommended daily vegetable intake,^{iv} and over half consume Free Sugars* above the recommended intake^v. With commercial foods for infants and toddlers growing in popularity and availability^{vi} consideration must be given to the composition of these foods and whether they reflect optimal nutrition in the early years of life.

Foods that are developed and marketed for infants and toddlers by the processed food industry should promote good health and good dietary habits, setting young children up for a healthy future.

The processed food industry uses harmful sugar ingredients in foods for infants and toddlers

There is a growing concern that some commercial infant and toddler foods are undermining work to promote optimal nutrition^{vii}.

Survey data released by CHOICE in August 2021^{viii} showed that 58 per cent of commercial toddler foods contain sugars that are harmful to health, 45 per cent of which contain sugar in high amounts. This is consistent with OPC research from 2019. The OPC study looked at both infant and toddler foods and found that 75 per cent of products reviewed contained sugars that are harmful to health, with concentrated fruit sugars like fruit juice concentrate,

fruit paste and fruit powder featuring in 47 per cent of products and pure sugar or syrups in 31 per cent of products.

Comprehensive regulation of the composition of infant and toddler foods will protect our youngest Australians

The food regulatory system must ensure that all foods marketed for infants and toddlers are of high nutritional quality and meet strong, evidence-based standards on composition.

Strong standards already exist in some areas, for example in limiting sodium and honey for infants. This mandatory protection can, and should, be expanded to protect both infants and toddlers, and to include strong limits to stop manufacturers adding sugars that are harmful to health (that is all Free Sugars, including Free Sugars derived from fruit sources) to food for infants and toddlers.

The government must take responsibility for protecting infants and toddlers from commercial foods that do not promote good health and good dietary habits.

Recommendations

Reforms must be led and developed by government, and not voluntary bodies dominated by industry representatives, like the Healthy Food Partnership.

Regulation to improve the composition of infant and toddler foods should ensure that:

- Free Sugars are not used in infant and toddler foods, with limited specific exceptions for:
 - purees - for infants only; and
 - a limited amount of minimally processed fruits (pureed ($\leq 5\%$) and dried ($\leq 2\%$)) in certain categories of infant and toddler foods (meals, cereals, or desserts); and
- sweet snacks and confectionary are not marketed as suitable for infants and toddlers.

In addition to the compositional elements, labelling regulation should ensure that all sugars that are harmful to health (Free Sugars) are easily identified.

*Free Sugars are all sugars that are **not** found in intact fruit and vegetables or dairy products. **ALL** Free Sugars, consumed in excess, are significant contributors to unhealthy weight gain and dental caries.

ⁱ World Health Organization (WHO). *Guidance on Ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children: implementation manual*. Geneva WHO, 2017. Licence CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

ⁱⁱ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). *Improving Young Children's Diets During the Complementary Feeding Period*. UNICEF Programming Guidance. New York: UNICEF, 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). *Improving Young Children's Diets During the Complementary Feeding Period*. UNICEF Programming Guidance. New York: UNICEF, 2020.

^{iv} Australian Bureau of Statistics. 4364.0.55.001 - National Health Survey: First Results, 2017-18. 2018. Table 17.3.

^v Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Nutrition across the life stages. Canberra, Australia 2018. Supplementary table 19.

^{vi} IBISWorld (2019). IBISWorld Industry Report: Baby Food Manufacturing in Australia.

^{vii} World Health Organization (WHO). *Guidance on Ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children: implementation manual*. Geneva WHO, 2017. Licence CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

^{viii} <https://www.choice.com.au/babies-and-kids/feeding-children/making-healthy-choices/articles/sugar-in-packaged-toddler-foods>