

Many not-so-healthy foods are now masquerading as good snack options for kids. HFG dietitian Zoe Wilson shows you how to spot the frauds.

You're standing in the yoghurt aisle in the supermarket with the kids, just about to grab a tub when a little voice pipes up from beside you - 'but I want the one with *Dora the Explorer*, mum!' While it may look good to your children, is it actually healthy? And if you say no, how do you avoid the fight and tears that come when you take the *Dora* box out of the little hands and pick up another yoghurt?

The marketing of 'kids foods' not only works at selling a particular brand but is linked to

children eating more 'junk' food in general, according to research by the Sydney School of Public Health's Physical Activity, Nutrition and Obesity Research Group.

Even the World Health Organisation has warned marketing poor-quality foods to children is a probable cause of weight gain. This is a major concern, given almost a quarter of our kids are struggling with their weight. Advertising lecturer and social commentator Jane Caro says there's a reason why kids advertising plays on 'pester power'.

"Children until around the age of 12 or 13 generally don't have money of their own, so they're targeted as an influencer," she says.

And the digital age has brought a whole new realm of marketing opportunities, through fun apps kids can play with on their phone or iPad. However, when an unhealthy product is pushed at kids, we need to complain to the manufacturer, not the advertiser, says Caro.

"Marketers will market what they're given. We need to look at what's in the food. Give a marketer a healthy product and they will market it."

So what can you, as parents, do to counteract the pull of clever marketing and give your kids the healthiest start in life? ➤



➤ 5 MISLEADING CLAIMS

Like a magic trick, some claims made on foods about certain 'good' aspects of the food can cleverly draw our attention away from some of the less healthy content, warns dietitian Jenn Madz, of the Healthy Kids Association. Some of the most common 'health halo' claims to keep an eye out for are:

1 'All natural' If a product is made from natural ingredients, it can still be full of saturated fat or sugar (after all, they're both natural). So, an 'all-natural' muffin may contain the same hefty amount of butter, sugar and kilojoules as your regular muffin.

2 '65% fruit juice' It may imply this is as good as a piece of fruit, but if a product has 65 per cent fruit juice, then there's 35 per cent of something else! Usually this is water, sweeteners like sugar or fruit juice concentrate and other ingredients like preservatives.

3 'Low fat' While this sounds healthy, low-fat foods will often compensate for taste by being higher in sugar than regular varieties, so may have more kilojoules than the regular option.

4 'No added sugar' or 'sugar-free' A sugar-free claim on a sweet product suggests it's been sweetened with an artificial sweetener. While a no-added-sugar product could have added fruit juice (still sugar) so it is a sweet treat, which still encourages a sweet tooth in your kids. Fruit juice adds empty kilojoules from sugar (it's just the fruit sugar), without giving your kids any other nutrients like protein, fibre, vitamins or minerals.

5 'Gluten-free' Unless your child has been diagnosed with Coeliac disease or a wheat intolerance, there's no benefit to avoiding products with gluten. Gluten-free is not necessarily healthier. In fact, gluten-free foods may be lower in fibre due to the gluten-free grains. They can also be as high in saturated fat and salt as the regular version, so check the label.

A child who watches two hours of television a day will watch the equivalent of three days of junk food ads a year!

KIDS' FOOD imposters



HFG dietitian Zoe Wilson also runs nutrition clinics in the Sydney area.

► HELPING KIDS SEE THROUGH THE HYPE

Firstly, try to help your kids understand what a healthy food is by talking to them about which foods are everyday foods and which foods are better enjoyed once a week. Help your kids learn to discriminate. Explaining to them why some foods are everyday foods and why others are not will help encourage them to see through the hype.

Try phrases like

"If you really want to do well in that exam, you need a grainy cereal that will help keep you concentrating for the whole morning, rather than the highly-processed cereal that you'll digest quickly and will leave you feeling fuzzy-brained."

"You could have that chocolate bar, but you'll feel sick when you're on the field and your energy will slump quickly, so how about a banana instead?"

"If you're hungry and would like dessert, let's choose something like yoghurt that will help you grow up big and strong!"

► SPOTTING THE GENUINE HEALTHY FOODS

It's comforting to know the court of public opinion is now holding manufacturers to account. According to Caro, the rise of social media means marketers are avoiding targeting kids in any untoward way, fearing the possible online backlash.

"They're being held accountable instantly. Social media is a very effective and instant checker of what the market feels is appropriate and what isn't," she says.

Meanwhile, rather than trusting the claims written on the front of the pack, your best guide to a product's health value is to always look at the ingredients list (see p29).



So what ARE good kids' snack foods?

Replace the imposters for these healthy snacks as recommended by Healthy Kids, an initiative of NSW Department of Health, NSW Department of Education and Communities and the Heart Foundation.

• Fresh or canned fruit

Whole or chopped fresh fruit, or tinned fruit in natural juice.

• Veggie sticks

(e.g. carrot, cucumber, capsicum) with low-fat dips such as salsa or tzatziki.

• Wholemeal or multigrain raisin toast, bread, pikelets and pancakes,

English muffins, crumpets or scones with a little light cream cheese, ricotta or fruit spread.

• Wholegrain rice crackers topped with vegetables and reduced-fat cheese, vegemite or sliced banana.

• **Dried fruit** While fresh is best, dried fruit can make a nice change, just be sure to stick to small serves (4-6 apricot halves, or a 40g box of sultanas).

• Reduced-fat yoghurt

• **A healthy home-made wholemeal mini muffin.** Just be careful with size as "bigger serves undo the good work put into making it a healthier version," explains Madz.

For more on healthy snacks for kids visit healthykids.nsw.gov.au or healthy-kids.com.au

► THE NEW WORLD OF DIGITAL MARKETING

The new frontier for kids' food marketing is in smartphone apps. Brands are producing engaging kids' games that are making it extremely difficult for parents to stay strong against pester power. The Parents' Jury Fame and Shame Awards, aimed at exposing the worst advertising, last year for the first time included a 'Digital Ninja' award for the most insidious kids' apps.

"Children of all ages have access to multiple

forms of social and digital media, making them an easy target for the marketers of

unhealthy food. It's a constant challenge, even for the most

vigilant of parents, to oversee what their child is

accessing online," said campaign manager for The Parents' Jury, Corrina Langelaan.

Joint winners of the inaugural Digital Ninja award were the Hungry Jack's 'Makes it Better' app and Chupa Chups 'Lol-a-Coaster'.

The Hungry Jack's app encouraged kids to eat the store's food by giving them free food offers and the ability to locate the closest Hungry Jack's store with the simple shake of their smart phone.

Chupa Chups 'Lol-a-Coaster' app is a game where the main character has a lollipop fixed to his mouth and branding is prevalent.

It also offered a prize world trip for entering codes found on Chupa Chups lollipops.

In the last few months, Fanta has entered the fray with its Flavour Lab app, which encourages kids to create new flavours by mixing the current Fanta range together in the app. The concern is this will translate to kids mixing the flavours in real life and drinking more soft drink. The app also includes games, the chance to win Fanta tokens and compete for prizes, too, making it a multi-faceted branding exercise.

Brands are producing engaging kids' games making it extremely difficult for parents to stay strong against pester power

SPOT YOUR BEST CHOICE

Compare the packs of these common foods and see if you can work out which is the best choice.

Turn the page for the answers ►



OR

Nutri-Grain

Coles Mighty Grain



OR

Le Snack cheddar cheese

Mainland On the Go light tasty cheese & crackers



OR

Healthieries cheese Rice Wheels

Sakata plain Wholegrain rice crackers



OR

All Natural Confectionary Snakes

Starburst Rattlesnakes

► BEWARE 'RED SNEAKERS'!

Sugary, high-fat snacks, once considered occasional foods, are now regularly sneaking into school lunches, largely thanks to clever marketing.

Based on a food spectrum where green is an everyday food, amber means select carefully and red is an occasional food, these snack foods have been dubbed 'red sneakers'.

"Red sneakers are occasional foods that are sneaking into the lunchbox every day instead of perhaps once a week", says Madz. Here are some common offenders:

1 Fruit juice snacks like Nice & Natural Fruit Charms, Uncle Toby's Roll Ups, Super Mario Brothers fruit snacks and Florida's Natural Fruit Nuggets. These come with health halo claims such as '65% fruit juice', 'no artificial colours or flavours', '99% fat free' and 'gluten free'. These give your child the sugar, but not the vitamins, minerals and fibre of fruit. They also get stuck to kids' teeth and cause cavities.

2 Nutella snack packs Even though they contain no added colours and preservatives, the first two ingredients in Nutella are sugar and vegetable oil. And, when added to the lunchbox in snack pack form, is similar to giving them a chocolate bar.

Snack foods once considered occasional foods are now sneaking daily into school lunches, thanks to clever marketing

3 Yoghurt-covered dried fruit or hard yoghurt balls This hard yoghurt is high in saturated fat and sugar (although you may think they are healthier with their 'gluten-free' claims) – kids are better off with fresh fruit, or a small amount of plain dried fruit, such as dried apricots or sultanas, instead.

4 Natural Confectionery Company lollies Just because they have the word 'natural' in their name and the claims 'no artificial colours, no artificial flavours, 99% fat free' doesn't mean they are lower in sugar than any other lollies. And whether natural or not, they don't provide any other vitamins, minerals, protein or fibre.

5 Muesli bars with yoghurt or chocolate toppings Some of these claim to have '20% of your daily wholegrain target', yet what they don't shout about is the fact that these toppings are high in saturated fat and sugar, so aren't the healthiest choice.



Ingredients

Cereals (66%)(rice, rolled barley, wheat, oats [7%], puffed triticale), sugar, wheat gluten, honey (5%), wheat flour, minerals (calcium carbonate, iron, zinc oxide), salt, molasses, flavours, barley malt extract, vitamins (niacin, vitamin B6, riboflavin, thiamin, folate). **CONTAINS GLUTEN CONTAINING CEREALS. MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF PEANUTS AND/OR TREE NUTS.**

• **The length** The longer the list, the more processed the food and generally, the worse a choice.

• **The first three ingredients** If sugar, fat or salt are in the first three ingredients it's probably not a great choice. Ingredients are listed in order of the amount that's in the food, for example bread will have flour as number one on the ingredient list or muesli will have oats. Also have a look at the last three ingredients, this is where you're likely to find additives such as preservatives, colours and flavours.

• **Lolly-like ingredients** Stay away from foods which feature hard yoghurt, chocolate, sugar sprinkles or marshmallow in the

ingredients list (think yoghurt-coated muesli bars or chocolate drizzled biscuits). These will be higher in energy and saturated ('bad') fat.

• **Opt for wholegrains, seeds, nuts or dried fruit** These are going to give your child more healthy fibre.

• **Go for milk, cheese or yoghurt**, which provide protein to help fill them up, as well as having more of the vitamins and minerals they need to grow. The nutrition information panel is the most detailed guide to the proportion of ingredients you'll get in a serve, and allows you to recognise if a food is too high in unhealthy ingredients and too low in important nutrients.hfg

Junkbusters run by Cancer Council NSW, was developed to help parents understand the regulations surrounding the marketing of food to kids. If you're concerned about a particular ad, visit junkbusters.com.au.

... AND THE WINNERS ARE

WINNER Coles Mighty Grain The Coles version has less sodium and more fibre for a similar amount of energy, saturated fat and calcium.



WINNER Mainland the Go This winner has almost double the filling protein and less than half the sodium for only slightly more kilojoules and far fewer ingredients – so makes a much better choice for a lunchbox.



WINNER Sakata Even though the Healthies Rice Wheels say they have '65% less fat' and are gluten-free, the Sakata crackers are lower in energy and saturated fat. They also have almost half the sodium and are gluten-free, too!



NEITHER! Despite the name of the All Natural Confectionery Company, both are very similar nutritionally and the ingredients lists are just about the same length.

