

## Food matters

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Do you really know what's in your child's food?

As you whizz along the supermarket aisles, some knowledge of chemistry as well as nutrition would help when you check out labels. Ever heard of titanium dioxide? No, me neither. Apparently it is used as a whitener in paint, plastics, inks and, er, children's cakes. The food industry thrives on the illusion that it is giving us lots of information, when actually it tells us very little. Take a packet of Kellogg's Honey Loops, with its "wholegrain goodness". A Which? report last year gave this popular children's cereal black marks for its sugar and salt content. Just one helping for your six-year-old could contain 16% of the recommended daily salt intake. With a second helping and a piece of toast, they'll have wolfed down half of that day's recommended daily allowance (RDA) of salt — 3g — before you've even got them out the door.

The packet, however, says that one helping of the cereal contains only 9% of salt RDA. Why so low? Because Kellogg's, like many other food manufacturers, uses an adult's RDA on the labelling of products that target children. Nestlé Smarties Cookies, Tesco caterpillar cake and Rowntree's Randoms sweets also use this system. It's good news for the big brands, because it often makes their products appear to be healthier for children than they actually are. Shoppers, however, might rightly feel they are being misled.

Netmums, the online parenting organisation, is campaigning for all supermarkets and manufacturers to use a traffic-light system that gives a red mark to foods high in fat, sugar or salt. Sainsbury's and Waitrose already use this system. Tesco and many other brands, including Kellogg's and Nestlé, prefer giving nutritional information as a proportion of recommended intake.

The result: confusion. Supermarkets and big brands must agree on one shopper-friendly labelling scheme. Above all, it should be made much clearer when a children's cereal contains a hefty dose of salt.