

## **“Healthy” Snacks Loaded with Sugar – The Sunday Times, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

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“HEALTHY” low-fat snacks sold by Britain’s supermarkets contain up to 69% sugar — more than three times the amount found in chocolate ice cream.

A range of products — bought as healthy options for children’s lunchboxes and office snacks — are being sweetened with extra sugar and glucose syrup. Many low-fat options have a sugar content significantly higher than in the conventional products.

Health experts are now demanding the food industry reduce its reliance on sugar in many popular processed foods. They warn new research shows too much sugar not only makes you fat and causes tooth decay, but might increase the risk of heart disease.

They say savoury foods from tinned spaghetti to chilli con carne sauces are also being over sweetened with extra sugar. Even some supermarket sushi — a popular “healthy” option — is given a sprinkling of sugar.

Professor Alan Maryon-Davis, president of the Faculty of Public Health, said: “Sugar is a cheap commodity and is used in bulk in a lot of foods. There needs to be pressure on the industry to produce foods which have a lower sugar content.”

Popular options for lunch-time snacks can contain as much as two-thirds sugar. Fruit Bowl apple and strawberry fruit flakes contain 69% sugar, with more than 13.8g in a 20g packet and more than five times the amount of sugar found in fresh fruit. By comparison, Häagen-Dazs chocolate ice cream contains only about 20% sugar.

Tesco Healthy Living forest fruit and raisin bars contain 50% sugar, with two spoonfuls of sugar in every bar. Kellogg’s Fruit Winders Doubles, which are marketed as “all the goodness of fruit, with the great taste of a sweet”, are 37% sugar.

Kellogg’s Special K Fruits of the Forest bars — promoted to consumers hoping to keep their weight down — are 39% sugar, a higher proportion than in the company’s Coco Pops cereals.

The bars contain more than five types of sugar, including glucose syrup, fructose, dextrose and glycerol. They also contain sorbitol, an artificial sweetener.

In recent years, the food industry has focused on reducing saturated fat in products because of its links to obesity and heart disease. In many cases, sugar was used to compensate for the loss of taste and texture from lower fat content.

The baked low-fat version of Walkers ready salted crisps has 16 times more sugar (6.5g per 100g) than in the regular version (0.4g). Yeo Valley natural yoghurt has 8.4g of sugar in the low-fat version, compared with 6.6g in the regular version.

Soups, baked beans and chilli con carne sauce can contain up to 6% sugar, although one of the biggest producers, Heinz, has reformulated products to reduce both salt and sugar.

A supermarket snack such as chicken tikka with some mango chutney can contain nearly four teaspoons of sugar. Sugared water is even added to the rice in supermarket sushi, so that 10% of the whole product is sugar.

The Food Standards Agency classifies a high amount of sugar as more than 15g per 100g, and a low amount as less than 5g per 100g. Officials have urged the industry to reduce sugar, fat and salt in products.

The sugar lobby has argued that the “balance of evidence” does not indicate sugar causes obesity, heart disease and diabetes. However, a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association last month said people who ate more added sugar were more likely to have lower levels of good cholesterol and higher levels of some blood fats, which are risk factors for heart disease.

“Just like eating a high-fat diet can increase your levels of triglycerides and high cholesterol, eating sugar can also affect those same lipids,” said Dr Miriam Vos, one of the authors of the study.

The Food and Drink Federation said food manufacturers had worked hard to improve food labelling and reformulated hundreds of products in the past two years to reduce levels of salt, fat and sugar.

Barbara Gallani, its director of food safety and science, said: “Demonising individual food components doesn’t help consumers to build a realistic approach to their diet. The key to good health is a balanced and varied diet, in the context of a healthy lifestyle that includes plenty of physical activity.”

Ian Ding, managing director of Fruit Bowl, said the fruit flakes were not marketed as healthy and said added sugar was required as part of the manufacturing process. A spokesman for Kellogg’s said its Winders Doubles and Special K bars each contained the equivalent of less than two teaspoons of sugar, which was less than 10% of recommended intake.