

## Children's nutrition traps 9 foods for kids that masquerade as healthy options

*They may appear healthy but check out their salt, sugar, fat and kilojoules - foods that masquerade as healthy choices but aren't, according to Catherine Saxelby.*

### Rice crisps/crackers

Rice crisps are viewed by parents as the 'ultra-healthy kids' snack' and a low-fat alternative to potato crisps. These thin crisp rounds attract parents' attention with their claims of 97 per cent fat-free and gluten-free but the downside is they're loaded with salt and flavour enhancers.

They're made from white rice flour (although Sakata have marketed wholegrain variants with some success) which makes them high GI and concentrated carbs. One 25g serve or 10 to 12 crackers lands you with 440kJ and 20g of carbohydrates. You think they're light as you're not that full yet you've ingested the same kilojoules and carbs as a thick slice of good old-fashioned bread.

Plain varieties have just three simple ingredients - rice flour plus a little oil and salt. But the flavoured varieties (BBQ, cheese, chicken, tomato salsa, seaweed, sour cream and chives) have an ingredient list as long as your arm and just as much salt.

For instance, Sakata BBQ flavour rice crackers have 17 ingredients including three flavour enhancers, an anti-caking agent, hydrolysed vegetable protein (boosts the savoury flavour), mineral salt, anti-caking agent (to stop the crackers from sticking) and hydrogenated soy oil (which means trans fat). See my label comparison below.

#### Plain Sakatas

Per 100g

1720kJ

87% carbs

405 mg sodium

INGREDIENTS: rice 97%, veg oil and salt

#### BBQ Sakatas

Per 100g

1740kJ

85% carbs

335 mg sodium

INGREDIENTS: Rice 93%, vegetable oil, sugar, 3 flavour enhancers 621 627 631, hydrolysed vegetable protein, flavour, spices, salt, garlic, mineral salt 341, onion powder, worchestershire powder, anti-caking agents 504, partially-hydrogenated soy oil, acidity regulator 330.

### **Hot instant noodle soups**

They're cheap, filling and parents think they're great. But really they're very processed foods with additives and way too much salt. A polystyrene tub of Fantastic noodles in Chicken Chow Mein flavour, for instance, adds over 8 g saturated fat, 48 g carbohydrates and a whopping 1061mg sodium.

### **Muesli bars**

Often regarded as healthier than biscuits or cake, these single-serve bars are no longer the humble oats-and-dried fruit fingers of old. Today most come with choc chips or a thick yoghurt topping to make them "more interesting". Or they're a high-sugar processed version of best-selling kid's cereals such as LCMS (Rice Bubbles and Coco Pops) or Nutri-Grain bars or Milo bars.

Compared to the original cereal, the bars are a poorer choice with more sugar, more additives and a sticky nature that dentists hate. Manufacturers use sugars of various kinds — usually ordinary sugar (sucrose), glucose or glucose syrup or honey — to hold the bar together.

A 2006 Choice survey of 150 brands of muesli bars, cereal bars and breakfast bars found most of them are more than 20 per cent sugar, and some deliver more saturated fat than a packet of chips. Even the 'fruit' in them can be a sham — a laboratory creation of fruity flavours, gels and sugar.

Uncle Toby's Honeycomb flavour Yoghurt Topp muesli bar has 8.8g of sugar - as much as from two teaspoons of sugar - and 5.4g of fat per bar - as much as from a teaspoon of butter. It pushes all the anxious-parent buttons on the front - namely "goodness of oats", "natural flavours and colours" and "source of fibre" and the %DI thumbnails. And there's even wholesome Aussie swim champion Grant Hackett promoting it on the back.

### **Juices and poppers**

Freshly-squeezed juices are healthy, natural, made fresh in front of you while you wait. No added sugar. No colours or preservatives. Nothing from concentrate. Squeaky clean, right? Well not quite. The high content of natural fruit sugars in fresh juices and their concentrated nature (a typical tall 500ml container is equivalent to 5 or 6 pieces of whole fruit but minus the fibre) makes them a high kilojoule trap for kids.

They're all too easy to overconsume without realising it. You sip, sip, sip and before you know it, the juice is gone. Juice has the same kilojoule-density as soft drink — around 10 to 12 per cent sugars and over 800kJ from a 500ml serve. Not something for sedentary kids.

### Natural jellies and jubes

Sales of jellies, snakes and fruit jubes made with no artificial colours, flavours or preservatives are booming. They give us 'permission' to indulge. They're the treat without the guilt.

Parents can now feel they're doing something right as they buy lollies made red with natural anthocyanins instead of more suspicious azorubine (additive code number 122) or Allura red AC (code 129). Yellow and orange hues are derived from turmeric or paprika rather than tartrazine (102). Purple tones are extracted from grape or elderberry, not Brilliant Blue FCF (133).

Yet whether it's Allen's (owned by food giant Nestle) or Natural Confectionery Company (purchased by Cadbury Schweppes in 2003), you'll consume the same kilojoules and sugar.

A 50 g serve (about 6 snakes) still packs on 710kJ and 39g carbs, even though there's less than a gram of fat (most confectionery trumpets that it's 97% fat-free which could apply to all products).

#### Snakes 200g pack

99% fat-free

##### INGREDIENTS

Glucose syrup, sugar, gelatine, thickener (1420) [wheat], food acid (citric acid), flavours, colours (102, 110, 122, 123, 133)

#### Natural Confectionery Snakes 200g pack

No artificial colours, no artificial flavours, 99% fat-free

##### INGREDIENTS

Glucose syrup, sugar, gelatine, wheat starch, food acid (citric acid), natural flavours including orange essential oil, fruit juice concentrate, natural food colours extracted from fruit, vegetables and plants (turmeric, anthocyanins, paprika oleoresin, grape skin extract, glazing agent (vegetable oil, carnauba wax)).

### Fruit leather/fruit straps

These proclaim they have no added sugar, nothing artificial and 100 per cent fruit. Some, made from apple or peach or nectarine, are low GI. Reading the pack, an unsuspecting parent would think their kids were getting the equivalent of 3 or 4 pieces of fresh fruit.

Yet these long flat straps are so far removed from real fruit, it's laughable.

- Eat 3 or 4 apple rings (20g of dried apple) and you get 260kJ, 12g carb and 3g fibre.

- Eat one 20g apple fruit strap and you get around the same 260kJ and 12g carb but only 2g fibre and much less potassium. There's less 'goodness' there.

Like dried fruit, it's concentrated in fruit sugars and calorific - a solid 60 per cent natural sugars even though there's no added sugar - so it's something to eat in small quantities. Being sweet and sticky, it can stick around the teeth and set the scene for tooth decay.

Like most modern food, fruit leather isn't as filling as munching on a whole piece of fruit. Three mouthfuls and it's gone!

### **Apricot delights**

Sweet and more-ish, these apricot-based squares are more akin to confectionery than dried fruit. Grab a bag and you'll be sucked in by the marketing - 96% fat-free, fibre, gluten-free, now with 25% more fruit. But read the list of ingredients and you'll soon notice that only half is apricots. The rest is sugar, syrup, some sort of oil, starch, with colour, flavour and preservative added. At 82 per cent carbohydrate, they have twice the carb content of plain dried apricots.

### **Sports drinks and sports waters**

Now that fizzy drinks are banned from schools and vending machines, sports drinks have filled the gap. Kids playing a round of soccer on a Saturday afternoon are urged to guzzle a bottle thanks to clever marketing claims about replacing electrolytes and proper hydration for peak performance. Yet for most children, sports drinks – with their 6 per cent sugar, artificial colours and extra salts – are unnecessary. Unless your child is exercising for an hour or more and sweating, all they need to replace any fluid lost is water, say sports dietitians.

Sports waters (Mizone, Powerade Sports Water) are a less sugary solution. At a low 2 per cent sugar, they're like drinking water with a splash of sweetness. Refreshing without the sugar load. A lighter choice.

### **Breakfast cereals**

Choice believes that cereals aimed at kids can be amongst for the worst for nutrition. Their latest report of 152 cereals in May 2009 says that most contain too much sugar and many also contain too much salt. While Kellogg and Nestle have reduced the amount of sugar and salt in many types, they still remain high sources.

Popular cereals that are high in sugar (defined as more than 15 per cent) and low in fibre (less than 1.5g from a 30g bowl) are Cocoa Bombs, Nutri-Grain, Coco Pops, Coco Pops Chex, Froot Loops, Frosties, Rice Bubbles, Crispix Honey and Aldi Choco Rice and Choco Balls.

A condensed version of this list was published in Good Living in the Sydney Morning Herald on 14 July 2009 as part of a larger feature entitled "Winning the Food War".

If you want to improve your eating habits and learn how cook for health, Catherine's two books are a good starting point:

Nutrition for Life gives you the facts on healthy eating and how to put together a balanced diet. It covers those headline topics such as good fats, sugar, caffeine, fast food, dining out and food labels.

Zest: Recipes for Health & Vitality (co-authored with food editor Jennene Plummer) offers you delicious easy recipes for busy people. You can follow the Summer or Winter Menu plans to get you going.

You can order both online at Catherine's website at **[www.foodwatch.com.au](http://www.foodwatch.com.au)**