

Nutrition Guidelines for Heinz Little Kids™ Foods

Heinz (H.J. Heinz Company Australia Limited) has established healthy eating benchmarks for toddlers by developing nutrition guidelines for our Little Kids range of foods. These foods are specifically formulated for children aged 1-3 years, providing a healthier tasty choice, with a portion size and texture tailored to the toddler's stage of development.

These new Heinz Little Kids Guidelines are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia¹, and have been reviewed externally by paediatric dietitians. They incorporate both qualitative and quantitative criteria around food and food ingredients, and take into consideration toddler specific needs such as appetite and texture.

Parents want healthier foods for their children. They also play a major role in shaping their children's food preferences, and we know that healthy food habits, preferences and behaviours established early contribute to lifelong health².

There is now strong government support for healthier eating in children. The recently released strategy "Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020" recommends that children's health and nutrition be a key focus with the following actions targeting obesity³.

- ✓ increase the proportion of children and adults meeting national guidelines for healthy eating and physical activity by 15% within six years; and with healthy body weight by 3% within ten years
- ✓ ensure Australian children have a healthy start to life

The Heinz Company has a long history in Australia of providing nourishing foods for infants and toddlers and remains strongly committed to leading in early childhood nutrition by:

- developing and promoting healthier food choices for young children
- communicating the latest information in early childhood nutrition to parents and health professionals
- supporting research in early childhood nutrition

Setting the benchmark

Young children are still learning to eat. The types of foods that they are frequently exposed to and are learning to like, has significant implications for future health².

Toddlers are also vulnerable to inadequate nutrient intakes for a range of reasons:

- small appetite / small food capacity
- finicky eating behaviour
- inappropriate snacking (too much / too often / poor choices).

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Heinz Little Kids toddler snacks aim to meet the following criteria:

- increase use of whole grains (eg. brown rice/wholegrain cereals)
- no preservatives*
- no artificial colours
- no artificial flavours
- low in salt (<120mg per 100g)
- avoid hydrogenated oils/trans fats
- appropriate portion size and texture

*With the exception of those used in dried fruit, for acceptable product quality

The Heinz Little Kids Guidelines provide our product development process with specific nutritional targets to strive for within the Little Kids brand, for both meals and snack foods. One of the most important aspects of Heinz Little Kids snack foods is that portion sizes are managed to ensure they are appropriate for small appetites.

It isn't just about nutrients!

Setting guidelines around nutrient criteria is challenging because, while of course the nutritional value of food is important, we eat food as part of a total daily diet. Cheese for example, when assessed alone, exceeds common sodium, fat and saturated fat criteria. This does not mean that cheese ought to be avoided. We aim to encourage enjoyment of foods like cheese in moderate quantities, as part of an overall healthy pattern of eating.

“More of the good stuff, less of the bad stuff”

Our guidelines are based on the concept:

“Encourage more of the foods/ingredients that parents and health professionals want their children to eat more of” and “less of the foods and ingredients that parents and health professionals want children to eat less of”.

Using the Heinz Nutrition Guidelines

We strive to meet the criteria of the Heinz Little Kids Guidelines for both product development and promotion for all Heinz foods developed for children 1 to 3 years of age. Implementation of these guidelines has already resulted in improvements of nutritional attributes of our toddler foods.

Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents recommend¹:

- eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruits
- eat plenty of cereals, preferably wholegrain
- include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives
- include milk, yoghurts, cheese and/or alternatives
- limit saturated fat and moderate total fat
- choose foods low in salt
- consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing sugars

Detailed Criteria

Qualitative Aims

Heinz “Little Kids” toddler foods aim to:

- maximise use of whole food ingredients eg vegetables, legumes and fruits where possible
- increase use of whole grains eg brown rice/wholegrain cereals
- use best quality lean meat where possible and include fish and chicken varieties
- contain no preservatives (with the exception of dried fruit for acceptable product quality), no artificial colours and no artificial flavours;
- limit saturated fat
- avoid hydrogenated oils/trans fats
- limit sugar
- be low in salt (<120mg per 100g)
- be of appropriate portion size and texture for toddlers

We also aim to meet the following:

- clean ingredient statements - this means using familiar pantry style ingredients eg. “cornflour” not “Maize thickener 1422”
- eliminate unnecessary allergens
 - peanut free is a key objective given increasing allergy prevalence/ severity of peanut allergy, however foods that contain wheat/dairy as major ingredients (eg. pasta/cheese) ought not to be avoided because of allergen labeling requirement
- GM free
- no MSG
- no artificial sweeteners

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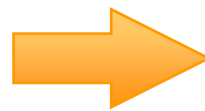
Product Successes

The existing product range including savoury meals and snacks was assessed against the Heinz criteria. Newer products were more likely to meet guidelines than older products, reflecting a recent and increasing focus on healthier ingredients and recipes. Older products which did not meet criteria are being reviewed, and are being progressively reformulated to meet criteria where possible.

The following are some examples of significant improvements in snack foods resulting from attention to the stated criteria. Each of the following products are specifically designed to be a toddler sized portion. Each “serve” is around 15g, and is shaped for a toddler to be able to hold and feed themselves.

Little Kids Muesli Fingers

ORIGINAL FORMULATION



NEW FORMULATION



- Replaced fortified muesli ingredient with whole foods (rolled oats, dried fruit, bran)
- Reduced yoghurt drizzle
- Reduced sodium content

Result:

- ✓ Reduced ingredient list complexity
- ✓ Reduced total fat by half
- ✓ Reduced saturated fat by 74%
- ✓ Decreased sodium by 47%
- ✓ Increased fibre, enabling a fibre source claim

Little Kids Fruit & Bran Bars

OLD FORMULATION



NEW FORMULATION



- Replaced palm oil with canola oil.
- Replaced nature identical flavour with all natural flavour.

Result:

- ✓ Reduced Saturated Fat by two-thirds

Little Kids Rice Bars



- Contains puffed rice (39%)
- Contains honey (6%) and banana juice concentrate (2%)

Compared to leading rice bar brand Kellogg's™ LCMs:

- ✓ Lower in saturated fat
- ✓ Lower in sodium
- ✓ Higher in fibre

Challenges

Our focus is to provide guidance for making real healthier foods but not make our criteria so prescriptive as to reduce capacity for innovation. A range of challenges were encountered in the process.

The first task was to review existing guidelines, however existing guidance on food recommendations for toddlers is limited. The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating does not address the diets of children younger than 4 years. We modified serving sizes to be more appropriate for toddlers.

The greatest challenge was in establishing the nutrient criteria for individual foods, while not wanting to be guilty of “nutritionism” – the reduction of food value to nutrients alone. However, specific nutrient criteria were necessary to guide internal product development team personnel. “Make it healthier” is not nearly specific enough direction to provide for a food technologist developing a recipe.

Which Nutrients?

Choosing which nutrients to focus on was the next step. For toddlers, energy varies significantly in young children with daily activity, appetite and growth rate, so we did not specify it, preferring to allow fat and sugar levels control for energy content. Saturated fat, sodium and sugar were the key nutrients we limited, since these are the most likely to be in excess in Australian toddlers’ diets⁶.

What Measure?

Per 100g quantities for setting criteria were chosen to simplify product comparison. Food product labels in Australia must provide nutrient content per 100g, so amounts can be simply compared as a percentage of the food composition. Sugar can be difficult to assess using this measure, because labels do not distinguish between intrinsic and added sugar. We aim for < 30% total sugar in sweet snacks, but this is difficult to achieve when fruit is a major ingredient and contributes significantly to total sugar content.

Total fat recommendation is different for 0-2 years and 2 years plus, which adds additional complexity for products aimed across both age categories at 1-3 years. Total fat and saturated fat criteria have been based on percentage of energy to align with NHMRC Dietary Guidelines. While this is acceptable for internal use, communication of “percentage of energy” to consumers is complex. We will consider reviewing this to a total fat /saturated fat per serve figure for simpler communication. Comparing fat and saturated fat level per 100g is less relevant, given the small total contribution that a small serve size provides.

Manufacturing Challenges

From a manufacturing point of view, these criteria are not simple to achieve. Healthier ingredients may be less commonly used, hence are less readily available and more expensive than commonly used ingredients. Ingredient choices can significantly alter texture and flavour, resulting in a less desirable tasting product or reduced shelf-life.

Customer acceptance is affected by many factors including: taste, price, product colour /shape and packaging appearance. From a marketing perspective, we exempted dried fruit from the “no preservatives” criteria based on colour acceptance – unpreserved dried fruit is a characteristic dark colour which consumers could perceive as “old” or “stale”. Unfortunately, sometimes “healthier” may be perceived as “mustn’t taste as good” so we aim to reach a balance of great tasting products and positive nutritional attributes.

Will it Sell?

Another challenge in providing healthier alternatives, is the “competitive set” of available foods that young children are learning to like. Encouraging repeated exposure to a wide variety of healthy foods like vegetables and fruits is important. It is also important to limit exposure to foods high in sugar, salt and fat, to help shape food preference for the healthier foods⁷.

Parents are not necessarily aware of this, and can be more focused on choosing foods they know their child will like to reduce the risk of food battles. As early as 8 months⁸, children are exposed to high salt spreads and snacks, and sweetened drinks. Consumption of ‘extra’ foods contributes 25-30% of total energy, fat, carbohydrate and sodium to the diets of 16-24 month old children in Australia⁹. Familiarity with these foods by repeated exposure increases young children’s liking for them⁷. This may make foods which are formulated to be less salty or sweet seem less appetizing hence less likely to succeed in the competitive supermarket environment. Products which meet benchmark criteria do not always sell well, and consequently are removed from supermarket shelves.

Your Feedback

These guidelines are a starting point which we would like to improve on where possible. We would appreciate your feedback to assist us to continue to develop healthier food alternatives for young children.

Please add your comments to this article via the blog or email us at hifas@au.hjheinz.com



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