New consultation to help children to enjoy healthier diets

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The government has launched a public consultation on applying the new Nutrient Profiling Model, which.

- Government launches public consultation on applying the new Nutrient Profiling Model, to tackle junk food advertising
- The new consultation will also outline measures to reduce the impact of hidden and added sugars
- Evidence shows free sugars – those added to products or released by processing – cause much worse outcomes for kid's health than total sugars.

Parents will find it easier to provide their children with a healthy diet with the government set to adopt a new model to assess the healthiness of food and drink.

Food and drinks identified as 'less healthy' by the government's updated Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) would be restricted from being placed in certain locations in stores, from volume price offers that encourage over-purchasing such as get 3 for the price of 2, and subject to advertising restrictions on TV before 9pm and online at any time, subject to consultation.

The previous model is more than 20-years-old and does not reflect modern dietary advice.

Applying the new NPM to junk food advertising and volume price restrictions could lead to 110,000 fewer cases of childhood obesity and up to 520,000 fewer cases of adult obesity in the long term.

The new model, based on the latest dietary recommendations, looks at the healthiness of food and drinks based on their balance of nutrients – calories, salt, saturated fat, protein and fibre – and also free sugars which are added to products or released during food processing.

Adopting the new model will mean some products often marketed as healthier but which contain hidden sugars or are high calorie and are often a driver of childhood obesity – such as certain sweetened cereals and fruit yoghurts could be in scope of the restrictions.

This will strengthen the impact of the existing restrictions, give parents a far clearer picture about what they are buying and encourage industry to reformulate so food marketed at children is healthier.

Health Minister, Sharon Hodgson said:

> With more than one in three children aged 10 to 11 overweight or obese we need to support parents to make the right choices for their children. That means full transparency on what's in the food marketed at their kids, and supporting the food industry to promote healthy choices over junk food.
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> This consultation is about strengthening protections for children, cutting hidden sugars, and making sure the rules are based on the best and latest evidence.

> It’s not about telling people what to eat – it’s about stopping families from being misled. We’re determined to reduce the child obesity epidemic and help parents raise the healthiest generation of children ever.

Some products have already been adapted to make them healthier. These include reductions in sugar in soft drinks of 47% due to the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, as well as businesses reducing the levels of sugar in breakfast cereals by around 15% and yogurts by over 13%. Reductions in salt levels of up to 20% have also been made. Applying the model will incentivise industry to improve the healthiness of the foods sold to consumers still further.

The change to the new model will also provide even greater clarity for parents as to what foods are healthier when making decisions on food and drink for their children.

The new model aligns to dietary recommendations on free sugars with children currently consuming double the recommended amount. High consumption of free sugars is directly associated with poor health outcomes and can often be found in food and drinks marketed as healthier than they actually are.

Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England said:

> Free sugar in children’s diets is mainly sugar which is added to foods or where processing has released it.
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> Free sugars are associated with increased levels of childhood obesity and other health harms, putting children’s health at risk for the rest of their lives.
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> Applying the updated Nutrient Profiling Model to advertising and promotions will reduce marketing of unhealthy products at children, helping to reduce excess free sugar consumption and benefitting current children’s health now and in the future.

The consultation builds on ongoing collaboration with industry to ensure we can collectively improve children’s diets. It invites views on how and when the new NPM should be used, the guidance businesses will need, and the timeline for implementation.

Childhood obesity remains stubbornly high, with more than one in three children aged 10–11 living with overweight or obesity, and rates in deprived areas more than double those in more affluent communities. Obesity not only places a significant strain on the future health of a child but also costs the NHS billions of pounds to treat.

The rules do not ban the sale of products; they simply stop the relentless pressure of advertising and promotions for foods high in free sugars, salt and saturated fat.

This consultation is part of a series of measures by this government to combat childhood obesity and help support parents to raise the healthiest generation of children ever. Other measures include extending the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, banning the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to the children under 16 and introducing supervised toothbrushing for 3 to 5-year-olds to protect those in the most deprived communities from tooth decay.

Free breakfast clubs at schools are already providing a lifeline for so many and more than 300,000 additional children are set to benefit from Best Start free breakfast clubs in April. The Healthy Start

Scheme is also helping provide those families eligible to buy healthy food and milk.

These are in addition to restricting less healthy food from being placed in certain locations in stores, being included in volume price promotions or being advertised when and where children are most likely to be watching.

Katharine Jenner, Executive Director of the Obesity Health Alliance, said:

> Current regulations do not fully protect children from exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing, whether on TV, online or at the checkout, which is why updating how foods are classified is a necessary and sensible next step.
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> Some products can look healthier on paper than they are in reality; a stronger model ensures advertising rules actually reduce children's exposure to less healthy options.
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> If we are serious about improving children's health, making the food on sale genuinely healthier is the first step to real change.

18-year-old Anna, Bite Back Youth Activist, said:

> We welcome this consultation. It shows the government is starting to listen to young people and take action on junk food marketing.
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> Right now, we're surrounded by ads and deals pushing unhealthy food everywhere — on our phones, on our streets, even on the way to school. We're not being supported to be healthy, we're being set up to fail.
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> This is an important step, but it needs to lead to real change so young people aren't being targeted at every turn, and we can grow up in environments that actually support us to be healthy.

Fran Bernhardt, Commercial Determinants Co-ordinator at Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming, said:

> The Nutrient Profiling Model has been crucial for progress on children's health. By allowing us to differentiate between healthier and less healthy foods and drinks, it's been the cornerstone of several successful policies. One of its key strengths is its simplicity - it's easy for businesses and policymakers to use and understand, and that must be preserved as the model is updated.
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> Opening this consultation is a welcome step, as unanswered questions remain around how to implement these changes. We urge the government to work closely with experts to ensure the necessary data and guidance are in place, so the updated NPM can continue - and strengthen - its role in safeguarding children's health.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-consultation-to-help-children-to-enjoy-healthier-diets