

News story: PHE launches Change4Life campaign around children's snacking

Public Health England (PHE) is helping parents take control of their children's snacking by launching the first Change4Life campaign promoting healthier snacks.

This is because half of children's sugar intake, currently around 7 sugar cubes a day, comes from unhealthy snacks and sugary drinks, leading to obesity and dental decay.

Each year children are consuming almost 400 biscuits; more than 120 cakes, buns and pastries; around 100 portions of sweets; nearly 70 of both chocolate bars and ice creams; washed down with over 150 juice drink pouches and cans of fizzy drink.

On average, children are consuming at least 3 unhealthy snacks and sugary drinks a day, with around a third consuming 4 or more. The overall result is that children consume 3 times more sugar than is recommended.

The new Change4Life campaign encourages parents to look for '100 calorie snacks, two a day max' to help them purchase healthier snacks than the ones they currently buy.

Selected supermarkets are supporting the campaign. As part of their wider work promoting good health, Tesco will help parents – instore and online – choose affordable, healthier snacks that are 100 calories or less. Co-op will also provide tasty and healthy snacking products, making it easier for customers to make healthier choices on the go.

Parents can also get money-off vouchers from Change4Life to help them try healthier snack options, including malt loaf, lower-sugar fromage frais, and drinks with no added sugar.

Many of the unhealthy snacks children consume regularly are high in sugar and also typically high in calories, for example:

- an ice-cream contains around 175 calories
- a pack of crisps contains around 190 calories
- a chocolate bar contains around 200 calories
- a pastry contains around 270 calories

The '100 calorie snacks, two a day max' tip applies to all snacks apart from fruit and vegetables, as children should also be encouraged to eat a variety of these to achieve their 5 A Day.

Dr Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist at Public Health England, said:

The true extent of children's snacking habits is greater than the

odd biscuit or chocolate bar. Children are having unhealthy snacks throughout the day and parents have told us they're concerned.

To make it easier for busy families, we've developed a simple rule of thumb to help them move towards healthier snacking – look for 100 calories snacks, two a day max.

Justine Roberts, CEO and founder of Mumsnet, said:

The volume of sugar kids are getting from snacks and sugary drinks alone is pretty mind-blowing, and it can often be difficult to distinguish which snacks are healthy and which aren't.

This rule of thumb from Change4Life will help parents make healthier choices, which can only be a good thing.

PHE's improved Change4Life 'Food Scanner' app also shows parents how many calories, sugar, salt and saturated fat is in their food to help make healthier choices easier. It can be downloaded from the App Store or Google Play.

With a third of children leaving primary school overweight or obese, tackling obesity requires wider action and is not just limited to individual efforts from parents. PHE is working with the food industry to cut 20% of sugar from the products children consume most by 2020, with work to reduce calories due to start in 2018.