

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Atal iechyd gwael - gordewdra](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Prevention of ill health - obesity](#)

OB31 : Ymateb gan: Ella's Kitchen | Response from: Ella's Kitchen



Prevention of Ill Health – Written Evidence

Overview

1. Ella's Kitchen welcomes the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into prevention of ill health – obesity.
2. We have sought to provide information on the effectiveness of the Welsh Government strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales.
3. As the UK's leading baby and kids' food brand, our focus is on the actions and regulations required to address childhood obesity.
4. Young children eat too much fat, salt and sugar, and not enough fruit and vegetables. According to research by Ella's Kitchen and Kantar:
 - Nearly a third (29%) of children aged one to five don't eat any fruit and vegetables at home.
 - Instead, they increasingly snack on products high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS).
5. Without action, young children will continue to suffer from diet related illnesses, such as obesity, which impact on their quality of life and future health.
6. From our experience, the best way to build better dietary habits is enjoyment. Our nutrition approach focuses on reducing sugar, offering healthier alternatives to HFSS snacks, and using recognisable ingredients.
7. The Welsh Government, industry, and civil society must work together to widen access to fruit and vegetables and nudge children into healthy habits.
8. While we support the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Strategy, which is wide-ranging and comprehensive, there remain policy gaps around intervention at ages one to five.
9. The early years is overlooked and underfunded, and we must take urgent action to:
 - Increase fruit and vegetables consumption by investing in early years food education.
 - Address child poverty by introducing free lunches to every child attending nursery on a funded place.

Building Healthy Habits

The impact of social and commercial determinants on obesity.

10. As the Health and Social Care Committee sets out, young children born today are more likely to suffer from diet-related illnesses, with high levels of obesity recorded. In 2022/23, the latest data from the Child Measurement Programme for Wales shows that nearly one in four children enter reception with overweight or obesity¹ (24.8%). Diet related issues particularly affect children in low-income households.
11. Ella's Kitchen agrees that the primary driver of obesity is poor diet, although this is influenced by many factors outside of the individual or family's control including environment, psychology, physiology, and income. Any action to reduce obesity must address the reality of what young children are actually eating.
12. Ella's Kitchen works with Kantar, the leading data, insights, and consulting company, to track this information. This provides us with an accurate picture of little ones' dietary habits and informs our product development. The research is helpful for the inquiry's investigation into the impact of commercial determinants on obesity.
13. Kantar possesses the UK's largest consumer panel of 30,000 households. The usage data used for this study includes over 10,000 individuals and identifies what they eat and drink and how this has changed over time. For more detail on the methodology please see the appendix.
14. Our latest findings show that young children consume too much fat, salt and sugar, and not enough fruit and vegetables:
 - Nearly a third (29%) of children aged one to five don't eat any fruit and vegetables at home on most days².
 - In the average reception class, only one or two children eat five servings of fruit and vegetables at home (6% of under-fives)³.
 - The majority (54%) of one to fives eat less than two servings of fruit and veg⁴.



eat less than one serving
of fruit and veg



don't eat the recommend
five servings of fruit and veg

15. For one- and two-year-olds, the picture is particularly worrying. The amount of fruit and veg consumed in this age range is at a five-year low⁵. We are concerned the cost-of-living crisis is having a real and negative impact on what children are eating.
16. Parents increasingly shop outside the baby food aisle at earlier ages, with half exiting it by the time their child is two. With only 1% of eating occasions for one to fives now coming from the baby aisle, many consume less healthy products elsewhere.
17. Toddlers increasingly snack on products high in fat, salt, and sugar. The percentage of occasions in the afternoon when they eat chocolate, biscuits, cakes, crisps, savoury snacks, ice cream, and confectionary jumps from 32% at age one to 52% at age two⁶.
18. The below table compares the most popular chocolate, cake, and biscuit products eaten by one to fives with our highest sugar toddler snacks. Each snack aisle equivalent has significantly higher levels of sugar, in each case over two and half times the amount of our baby aisle products.

Ella's Kitchen Products	Sugar (per 100g)		Snack Aisle Equivalent	Increase
Vanilla and Banana Baby Biscuits	20.1	56	Dairy Milk	2.8x
Apple and Ginger Baby Biscuits	16.5	52.1	Kinder Surprise	3.2x
Strawberry and Apple Oaty Biccies	14.6	42.5	Cadbury Milk Chocolate Mini Rolls	2.9x
Squishy Snack Pear and Cucumber	11.2	30	Barny Chocolate Sponge Bear Biscuits	2.7x
Tomato and Basil Oaty Biccies	11.0	27	Cadbury Animals Chocolate Biscuits	2.5x

19. Our consumer research also reveals insights into the motivations of parents. When working to address childhood obesity it is important not to shame parents, but to understand their needs. Value, health, and taste are the most important factors for them when buying baby food. Young children have strong tastes, and meals can be a source of anxiety if they reject healthier food.
20. The only way to build better dietary habits is enjoyment. When little ones enjoy healthy food, their love lasts a lifetime. Our nutrition approach therefore focuses on nudging young children away from less healthy HFSS snacks and enhancing education and access to fruit and veg. The second step is vital, as the ability to offer healthier foods is a privilege for more affluent households. Health and income inequalities must be addressed simultaneously.

21. Ella's Kitchen has four key policies to:

- Reduce sugar across our range: we only introduce new first food products (fruit and veg) that contain 10% less sugar than average. Our reformulation also reduced sugar content by 20% from 2016 to 2019, which has continued with new products launched.
- Offer healthier alternatives to HFSS snacks: we look at the market leading products consumed by under-fives, sold outside the highly regulated baby food aisle, and offer tasty alternatives with a better nutritional profile to give parents greater choice.
- Only use recognisable ingredients: to ensure parents know what they are feeding their little ones, we only use ingredients they would find in their own kitchen. We never use flavourings, food colourings, or artificial sweeteners.
- Promote fruit and vegetable consumption: we pack our products with produce, donate surplus stock to food banks, deliver sensory food education lessons, and advocate for policies to improve fruit and vegetable affordability and access.

22. Ultra-processed food has received attention around its potential impact on obesity. However, the definition is uncertainty and includes a huge range of products. These have vastly different levels of fat, salt and sugar, different degrees of processing, and a wide variety of ingredients.

23. Processing plays an important role in ensuring food safety and reducing food waste. At Ella's Kitchen, we use a degree of processing to ensure finger foods have a texture that is suitable for little ones who are just learning to chew, and which minimises choking risks. In addition, processing gives shelf life to a product to ensure it lasts longer and doesn't need to be thrown away. Without processing, parents would face reduced choice and increased prices at a time when the cost of living is already high.

24. As the UK Government's Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition has also found, it is uncertain whether processing has an impact on health beyond a product's fat, salt, and sugar content. A recent UCL study of more than 3,000 food and drink items found that several UPF fall into the 'healthy' green category of the HFSS traffic light system⁷, while UPF items are recommended in UK nutrition guidance.

25. Further research is required to establish a causal link between processing itself and poor health outcomes. In the meantime, the focus should remain on HFSS regulation (which encompasses less healthy UPF products anyway), to reduce the amount of fat, salt and sugar young children eat.

Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Strategy

Gaps/areas for improvement in existing policy and the current regulatory framework (including in relation to food/nutrition and physical activity)

26. Ella's Kitchen supports the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy and endeavours to be an active partner in achieving the goals of the programme. The Welsh Government's approach is based upon the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which we are strong advocates for.
27. Major challenges facing young children such as nutrition, poverty, and the climate crisis cannot be solved quickly. We need a long-term, holistic approach that places future generations at the heart of government policy. The Welsh Future Generations Act 2015 sets out strong legal obligations for Welsh public bodies to consider the impact of their decisions on the country's social, cultural, environmental, and economic wellbeing.
28. Ella's Kitchen is calling on the UK Government to adopt a UK-wide Future Generations Act, to give young children a voice and ensure their long-term interests are represented in the political system.
29. The Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Strategy takes a cross-Government approach which is reflected in four themes: healthy environments, healthy settings, healthy people, and leadership and enabling change.
30. Healthy environments covers both the food and active environments in which people live in. As our research on the commercial determinants of obesity shows, this is a crucial policy area. We must ensure young children significantly reduce the amount of saturated fat, salt, and sugar they consume, and eat more fruit and vegetables.
31. Ella's Kitchen agrees that more intervention is required on less healthy products outside of the baby food aisle. Proposed restrictions on the advertising and promotion of HFSS products, reformulation, and increased consumer information are sensible and will help reduce HFSS consumption. On the other hand, more could be done to increase the amount of fruit and veg in little ones' diets.
32. While our business does not directly encompass the active environment, we are pleased the strategy includes increased access to local green spaces. As part of our 'five for the under-fives' campaign we advocate for young children to connect with nature.
33. Access to nature is a human right and the Welsh Government must set out specific policies to enable little ones to take part in outdoor activities and education. The strategy currently focuses on transport in relation to green spaces, and lacks policies around play and exploration which are equally important considerations.

34. Ella's Kitchen is glad the strategy places healthy learning at the heart of its healthy settings theme. However, as too often occurs, intervention is focused on schools, and misses the opportunity to take preventative action in childcare and early years settings. While acknowledgment of the importance of play is welcome, additional action should be taken to roll-out sensory food education.
35. The importance of closing the health inequality gap suffered by disadvantaged communities is recognised in the strategy's healthy people theme, which emphasises prevention and early intervention. However, as elsewhere, major policy interventions only begin once a child reaches primary school. Further action is required to address the problem at the early years level.
36. Ella's Kitchen supports the strategy's position that enhanced financial support is required to enable parents on lower incomes to promote good nutrition choices for their children. On a UK-wide level we are calling for a rise in the value of Healthy Start Vouchers and the end to the two-child benefit cap.

Policy Solutions

Interventions in pregnancy and early childhood to promote good nutrition and prevent obesity.

- 1) Increase fruit and veg consumption by investing in early years food education.
37. As set out previously, the only way to build better dietary habits is enjoyment. We must increase funding and guidance for early years food education to ensure every child acquires the essential knowledge to make healthy choices. The early years are the most important period for childhood development, and a pivotal window for shaping lasting behaviours, habits, and health. We should focus nutrition interventions on this age group to prevent problems before they arise.
38. Food education during the early years should include sensory food play, an evidence-based approach which helps build children's confidence and curiosity about fruit and vegetables. Play is a vital learning tool, which shouldn't stop at mealtimes. Enabling little ones to explore different foods through play can enhance their enjoyment and willingness to try healthy foods.
39. Ella's Kitchen funded primary research into sensory food play at the Universities of Reading and Leeds. We worked with Dr Nick Wilkinson and Professor Marion Hetherington to undertake a systematic review of the current evidence around the educational tool in the early years.
40. Building on this research, we worked with Flavour School and the Early Years Alliance to develop age-appropriate lesson plans and free educational resources to support early years practitioners deliver effective sensory food education in their settings.

2) Address child poverty by introducing free lunches to every child attending nursery on a funded place.

41. All primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by September 2024, which is a positive step. However, hunger doesn't start at the age of five. The policy doesn't cover the many settings where families suffer food insecurity, and children arrive hungry.

42. State early years childcare support does not cover provision of food. Extending free lunches to nursery children attending on a funded place will widen fruit and veg access, reduce health inequalities, and improve educational outcomes.

About Ella's Kitchen

43. Ella's Kitchen is the UK's leading baby and kids' food brand. We share the Health & Social Care Committee's desire to reduce childhood obesity and encourage a healthy diet amongst infants.

44. Our mission is to help every little one grow up happy, healthy, and never hungry. We all have a collective responsibility to try to create a country where every child gets the best start in life. At Ella's, we have set an ambitious business goal to double the amount of fruit and vegetables under-fives eat by 2030, and work hard to help little ones develop healthy relationships with food.

45. Our products include fruit and vegetable pouches, baby meals, snacks, and finger foods, for children under five. The baby food aisle is rightly the most heavily regulated aisle in the supermarket. All our products are fully compliant with UK and EU regulations, and we have strict nutritional standards that go beyond industry requirements. These cover portion size, calories, fat, sugar, and salt at each age and stage to deliver appropriate nutrition for little ones.

46. In addition, our baby food products are 100% certified baby grade organic, and we have been a B Corp since 2016. This means we have a legal duty to put people and the planet on an equal footing with profit. We work with charity partners to advocate for policies which address child poverty and food insecurity, while protecting the planet for future generations.

Appendix

47. Kantar's Usage panel includes over 10,000 individuals who report on every food and drink product they have consumed throughout the week. The panel is weighted to be representative of the UK population. This data set covers all products brought back into the home. It does not include products/meals bought and consumed out of home.
48. The fruit & veg in this report are defined as all fresh, frozen, and ambient fruit & vegetables; pure juices; fresh & ambient soups. Product categories such as snack bars & ready meals which may include a portion of your 5-a-day but do not inherently/always contain a portion of fruit or vegetables are excluded from the reporting. The methodology does not record portion sizes, with each occasion recorded via our panel considered a portion.

References

- ¹ Public Health Wales NHS Trust (2024). Child Measurement Programme 2022/23. Public Health Wales. Available at: <https://publichealthwales.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/child-measurement-programme/cmp-2022-23/1-cmp-report-2022-2023/>
- ²⁻⁵ Kantar, Usage Panel, Fruit & Veg Consumption amongst kids aged 1-5 years old, 52 w/e August 2023
- ⁶ Kantar, Usage Panel, afternoon snacking consumption amongst kids aged 1-5 years old, 52 w/e October 2021
- ⁷ Dicken SJ, Batterham RL, Brown A. Nutrients or processing? An analysis of food and drink items from the UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey based on nutrient content, the NOVA classification and front of package traffic light labelling. British Journal of Nutrition. Published online 2024:1-14. doi:10.1017/S0007114524000096

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