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Nestlé adds sugar to baby food in low- and middle-income countries

These are the key findings of an investigation by Public Eye and the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)

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Two of the best-selling baby-food brands marketed by Nestlé in low- and middle-income countries contain high levels of added sugar, while such products are sugar-free in its home country, Switzerland. These are the key findings of an investigation by Public Eye and the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). On the eve of its Annual General Meeting, a petition demands that Nestlé put an end to this unjustifiable and harmful double standard, which contributes to the explosive rise of obesity and leads children to develop a life-long preference for sugary products.

Fifty years after the infant formula scandal, Nestlé claims to have learned from the past while doing everything it can to keep its world leadership in infant nutrition. The food giant controls 20 per cent of the baby food market, valued at nearly $70 billion. With more than $2.5 billion in world sales in 2022, Cerelac and Nido are some of Nestlé's best-selling baby-food brands in low- and middle-income countries. The multinational aggressively advertises these products as essential to children's healthy development in its main markets in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The results of the investigation "How Nestlé gets children hooked on sugar in lower-income countries" tell a completely different story. Public Eye and IBFAN scrutinized around 150 products sold by the food giant in lower-income countries. Almost all the Cerelac infant cereals examined contain added sugar – nearly 4 grams per serving on average, equal to roughly a sugar cube – although they are targeted at babies from six months of age. The highest amount – 7.3 grams per serving – was detected in a product sold in the Philippines. Most of the Nido powdered milk products for young children from one to three years old also contain added sugar – almost two grams per serving on average. The maximum value (5.3 grams) was detected in a product sold in Panama. In Switzerland and Nestlé's main European markets, such products are sold without added sugar.

The paediatricians and child nutrition experts interviewed by Public Eye denounce a double standard that is unjustifiable and problematic from an ethical and public health perspective, particularly because of the obesity epidemic affecting low-income countries. The WHO warns

that exposure to sugar early in life can create a life-long preference for sugary products that increases the risk of developing obesity and other chronic illnesses. Since 2022, the UN agency has been calling for a ban on added sugar in products for babies and young children under three years of age.

Whereas Nestlé recommends publicly avoiding baby foods that contain added sugar, it takes advantage of the weakness of existing regulations to continue selling such products in lower-income countries. Furthermore, the investigation by Public Eye and IBFAN shows that the Swiss multinational uses misleading marketing strategies, such as utilizing medical professionals and social media influencers to win the trust of parents in its products. A petition launched today demands that Nestlé put an end to these dangerous practices and stop adding sugar to products for babies and young children under three years old, in every part of the world.

Read online: https://nuffoodsspectrum.in/news/17/20997/nestle-adds-sugar-to-baby-food-in-low-and-middle-income-countries.html
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