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Reformulation of yogurts and baby foods marketed in Ireland: a snapshot of 2021 compared with 2017

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A 2017 survey reported wide variations in nutritional content of yogurts available on the Irish market, where some products were equivalent to desserts[(1)]. In 2018, a similar survey of baby (<12 months) foods found 25% were inappropriate due to levels of fat, sugar or salt or a comparable composition to biscuits and crisps[(2)]. This study aimed to assess food reformulation by examining yogurts and baby foods on the Irish market in 2021 compared with previous surveys. Information collected on yogurts and baby foods in 2021, 2018 and 2017 included product brand/name, nutrition information, portion size and nutrition and health claims. In 2021, data was collected from grocery outlets representing 69% of market share in Ireland, while in previous surveys data was collected from all grocery outlets in Dublin. At both timepoints, yogurts were categorised into 3 groups; natural, flavoured and luxury, and assessed as a healthy choice (HC) when nutritional composition per 100 g met all of the following criteria: total fat ≤3 g, saturated fat ≤1.5 g, sugar ≤5 g (natural) or ≤9 g (flavoured/luxury). Baby foods were categorised into 4 groups: breakfast, lunch/dinner, snacks and desserts, for comparison of products at both timepoints. Baby foods with no added salt and minimal amounts of sugar and fat were deemed appropriate, while all remaining foods, including biscuit and crisp type products, were deemed inappropriate. Data collected in 2021 were compared with that collected in previous surveys using appropriate statistical tests on log transformed data in SPSS (version 25). In 2021, *n*569 yogurts and *n*284 baby foods were collected compared with *n*578 and *n*481, respectively, in previous surveys. The proportions of natural and luxury yogurts in 2021 versus 2017 were significantly different (natural *n*74 (13%) *vs.* *n*48 (8%), $P = 0.010$; luxury *n*50 (9%) *vs.* *n*80 (14%), $P = 0.007$), while the proportion of flavoured yogurts were comparable. In 2021, yogurts contained significantly lower amounts of saturated fat ($P = 0.025$) and sugar ($P = 0.015$) compared with 2017, and significantly more met the HC criteria (165 (29%) *vs.* 132 (23%); $P = 0.010$). However, significantly lower proportions of these yogurts carried nutrition claims in 2021 compared with those not meeting HC criteria ($P < 0.001$). There was no difference in proportions of appropriate baby foods in 2021 compared with 2018, however, significantly lower amounts of sugar ($P = 0.045$) and salt ($P = 0.002$) were found. In snacks, significantly lower amounts of sugar ($P = 0.021$) and salt ($P = 0.012$) were apparent in 2021.In conclusion, significant progress in reformulation of yogurts was identified with more products meeting HC criteria and lower amounts of saturated fat and sugar in 2021. While there was some evidence of improvement in nutritional composition of baby food snacks in 2021, overall proportions of baby foods assessed as appropriate did not improve from 2018.

References

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