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Correspondence: The big issue is ultra-processing
Troublesome claims and descriptions

Sir: Thank you for last month's excellent, thought-provoking commentary (1) and the work done to classify a great range of mass-manufactured and marketed edible commodities as 'ultra-processed products'. A paradigm shift is most certainly needed. This may help to offset the impact of the advertising and marketing that accompanies such products, and also to communicate their nature.

My own professional concern here is breastmilk substitutes and commercial complementary food products for older infants and young children. The advertising and marketing of these products is of major concern. The manufacturers of ultra-processed products for babies and young children are making more and more health and nutrition claims. These give 'health glamour' to products which really are of low nutritional value compared with mashed fresh foods. An industry marketing survey has reported that the use of more than one nutrition and health claim can increase sales by as much as 20 per cent (2). The addition of a few optional 'nutritive' ingredients to an ultra-processed product may be claimed to protect or enhance all sorts of physical or mental functions (3).

In these days, the capacity of governments to regulate has become more and more limited. In many countries troublesome claims and descriptions go unchecked. Hopefully use of the concept of ‘ultra-processing’ will enable increased engagement by nutritionists in the critical processes of policy and regulation.

Elisabeth Sterken

Director INFAC Canada/IBFAN North America

esterken@infactcanada.ca

References

- 1 Monteiro C, Cannon G. The big issue is ultra-processing. What are ultra-processed products. [Commentary] *World Nutrition*, June 2012, **3**, 6: 257-268. Obtainable at www.wphna.org
- 3 National Starch and Chemical GmbH. Products offering more than one health claim are more attractive to consumers and this could translate into a 20 per cent sales boost, a study in Germany has found. *Nutraingredients USA*, 24 July 2007. <http://www.nutraingredients.com/Regulation/More-health-claims-increase-sales-study-finds>, accessed 23 June 2012.
4. International Baby Food Action Network. *Breaking the Rules Stretching the Rules*. Penang: IBFAN, 2011

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