

OPRU Project 8: What policy options will be effective in encouraging healthy feeding practices among infants and young children?

Phase 1 findings: Focus on formula and infant food products and packaging

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December 2020

This report presents findings from Phase One of a three-part qualitative longitudinal study on parents' experiences of introducing complementary feeding to their infants (starting solids). Phase One was completed when the infants were 4-6 months of age.

This report explores the role of commercial products in shaping feeding decisions, with a specific focus on **product packaging**. We consider follow-on formula, packaged purees, infant snack foods, and the wider role of brands

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Study context

A longitudinal, remote, qualitative research study that aims to explore the range of factors shaping parents' feeding decisions when starting solid foods.

62 parents/carers of infants from across England are enrolled in the study, participating in in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation exercises three times over the course of a year. All interviews take place over Zoom or via telephone.

Overall study questions:

How do parents of infants across the socio-economic spectrum experience the transition from milk to solid food?

What influences the food and drink parents across the socioeconomic spectrum choose for their infants?

What are the implications for public health policies that aim to facilitate healthy childhood diets?

1st interim report focus:

What is the role of packaging and packaged foods in shaping infant feeding decisions?

**Phase 1: July-Nov 2020
Infants 4-6 months at
recruitment date**

**Interim
report:
packaging
focus**

**Phase 2: Jan-May 2021
Infants 10-12 months at
interview date**

**2nd interim
report**

**Phase 3: July-Nov 2021
Infants 16-18 months at
interview date**

Study participants

No. participants

- 62 participants took part in an in-depth interview
- 60 also completed the photo elicitation exercise

Gender

- 61 female
- 1 male

Family composition

- 30 first time parents, 32 had at least one child
- 4 single parents, 58 2-parent families

Socio-economic spread

- 18 low socioeconomic position¹ (inc. 6 with total household income under £15,000)
- 23 medium socioeconomic position
- 21 high socioeconomic position

Ethnic makeup

- 92% self defined as White British, White or British
- Other ethnicities recorded: Irish, Indian, Black Caribbean, South Asian and Norwegian and Greek

Introduction of solids & packaged foods

- 10 participants had not yet started solids with their infants
- 14 had started solids but not yet given packaged foods
- 30 had given packaged foods sometimes
- 8 had given them frequently



Geographical distribution of study participants

¹SEP calculated using Kininmonth et al 2020's validated measure

How did parents use packaged products?

(Follow-on) formula

- ✓ At the point of interview, 27 of the infants were being exclusively breast fed, while 35 were not. A few of the exclusively breastfeeding parents were considering a gradual transition away from breast milk at the six month mark.
- ✓ As infants ranged between four-six months, six month+ follow-on formula was being considered by some parents, but very few had yet introduced it.
- ✓ Parents cited a range of factors influencing choice of formula brand including cost, experience with a previous child, recommendations from family members, what was available during lockdown, and what their infant responded best to.

“It was just the thing to do, wasn't it? It [follow-on] says from six months, so you go, oh, okay, that's the one we should be on.”
Mia, M SEP

“It's the milk we use. We used to use Cow & Gate and then HiPP and then we chose Aptamil when he started with milk reflux. It's the milk that makes it easier for him to keep the milk in his tummy.”
Ayanna, 1st time parent , M SEP

Purees in jars / pouches

- ✓ 52 parents had introduced solids into the infant's diet at the time of interview. While a minority of these (14) had stayed away from them entirely, purees in jars and pouches were used across SEP, and for a variety of reasons.
- ✓ Some parents used packaged purees as a primary source of infant food, searching either for unusual or more familiar flavour combinations depending on parental eating practices. For others, these foods were just about convenience when out and about.
- ✓ Other reasons for using packaged purees included: being considered a cost-effective way to introduce first tastes (avoiding food waste), a response to the infant's perceived preferences, and a way to feed safely if parents were anxious about allergens or salt.

“It's mostly shop-bought, so mostly pouches and jars of baby food. He will try stuff off our plate. I don't know, I think I'm just worried about if I've added salt to something, or is there too much sugar in it? At least I know with the actual baby food it's completely suitable for him”
Jeni, 1st time parent, H SEP

“I've found them really, really useful for when you're out and about. [Baby's name] hasn't had them yet. But we're going away in a couple of weeks. So I bought them to take with us then.”
Samantha, H SEP

“He'd just literally spit it [homemade food] out and wasn't interested, to the point where he actually smacked the bowl out my hands and got it all over the floor. So, I went and bought a few pouches and a few jars and he actually demolished the jar that I gave him at lunch time.”
Felicity, 1st time parent, L SEP

Infant snacks

- ✓ Packaged snacks were almost ubiquitous across SEP. They were not purchased for their nutritional content, but parents cited a range of other reasons for purchasing them, including: to keep infants occupied, to encourage self feeding and motor skills, and to include infants in communal family activities.
- ✓ Packaged snacks were considered a 'normal' and routine element of consumption practices by many of the families.

“So it's a pureed meal to get the nutrients in and then the [packaged] finger foods for him just to play with and explore the textures in his mouth”
Amy, L SEP

“So if she gets a little bit ratty or she gets a bit bored now, because obviously she doesn't really know what to do with herself. Yes, if she hasn't really had anything throughout the day, I'd probably give her a little snack then”
Jade, L SEP

Examples of product packaging

Prior to our qualitative findings we present examples of three infant product packages: Aptamil follow-on formula, Ella's Kitchen puree, and Kiddylicious strawberry wafers. We have annotated these packages with the attributes that may influence purchasing and that we sought to explore in our research.

These are:

- Brand
- Brand characters
- Colours
- Age recommendations / stages
- Health claims
- Nutrition claims
- Development-related claim
- 'Health halo' words and phrases
- Product explanations
- Nutritional information
- Ingredients
- Packaging mechanisms

Example Packaging – Follow-On Formula (e.g., Aptamil)



Example Packaging – Infant Foods (e.g., Ella’s Kitchen Pouch)

POUCH WITH NOZZLE – POPULAR FOR CONVENIENCE AND STORAGE WHEN OUT OF THE HOUSE
NB: some brands provide advice that these products should be fed from a spoon and not given to babies to suck from; however, this is inconsistent across the market.

AGE RECOMMENDATION
NB: Other products in this brand also have a ‘stage’, e.g., Stage 1 (4-6 months).



BRAND

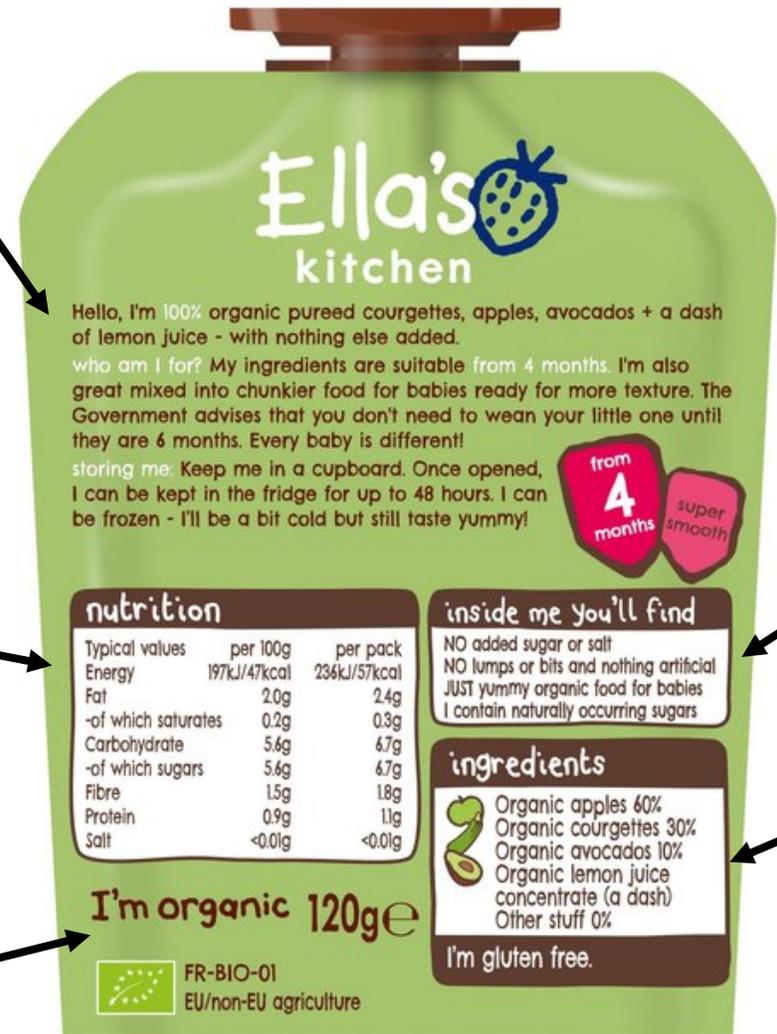
COLOURS AND GRAPHICS CHOSEN TO BE BRIGHT AND MATCH COLOUR OF FOOD CONTENTS

INGREDIENTS NOT LISTED IN ORDER OF CONTENTS

ORGANIC ‘HEALTH HALO’

EASY EXPLANATION OF PRODUCT

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION



SUMMARY OF CONTENTS TO APPEAL TO PARENT PRIORITIES

INGREDIENTS

Typical values	per 100g	per pack
Energy	197kJ/47kcal	236kJ/57kcal
Fat	2.0g	2.4g
-of which saturates	0.2g	0.3g
Carbohydrate	5.6g	6.7g
-of which sugars	5.6g	6.7g
Fibre	1.5g	1.8g
Protein	0.9g	1.1g
Salt	<0.01g	<0.01g

inside me you'll find
NO added sugar or salt
NO lumps or bits and nothing artificial
JUST yummy organic food for babies
I contain naturally occurring sugars

ingredients
Organic apples 60%
Organic courgettes 30%
Organic avocados 10%
Organic lemon juice concentrate (a dash)
Other stuff 0%
I'm gluten free.

FR-BIO-01
EU/non-EU agriculture

Example Packaging – Infant Snacks (e.g., Kiddylicious Wafers)

BRAND → KIDDYLICIOUS®
it's delicious

BRAND CHARACTER → strawberry Wafers

VIEW OF PRODUCT → 5 twin packs

AGE RECOMMENDATION → 6+ months

CLAIM RELATED TO BABY'S DEVELOPMENT → ENCOURAGES SELF FEEDING

INGREDIENTS → WHAT'S IN THEM? (Ingredients)

Typical values	Per 100g	Per 4g pack
Energy (kJ)	1620	65
Energy (kcal)	388	15
Fat (g)	1.5	<0.5
of which saturates (g)	0.6	<0.1
Carbohydrate (g)	86.8	3.5
of which sugars (g)	10.3	<0.5
Fibre (g)	0.6	0.03
Protein (g)	5.0	<0.5
Salt (g)	0.36	<0.01

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION →

WAFERS OFTEN SOLD IN MULTIPACKS → 5 twin packs

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS TO APPEAL TO PARENT PRIORITIES →

- SUITABLE FOR... Coeliacs, Dairy intolerant, Vegetarians
- NO gluten, dairy, nuts or egg added
- NO added salt
- NO artificial flavours or colours added
- NO added preservatives

COLOURS AND GRAPHICS CHOSEN TO BE BRIGHT AND MATCH COLOUR OF FOOD CONTENTS → Strawberry graphics

KIDDY CARE: Kiddylicious Wafers are specifically developed for children from 6 months. Always supervise young children whilst they're enjoying them. (5 x 4g) 20g e

Overview of key findings

Follow on Formula

Elements of packaging & branding create confusion over role of follow-on formula

- Parents have a sense that switching from first formula to follow-on formula is unnecessary, but this understanding is confounded by follow-on formula branding on packaging and related advertising
- Parents consider there to be other benefits to follow-on beyond those noted on packaging

Packaged purees

Parents look for indications that first packaged foods are age appropriate, healthy and 'pure'

- Parents identify proxies for positive attributes on packages
- Age recommendations on packages create confusion while providing security for early introduction of solids

Snacks

Parents choose packaged snacks that advertise valued attributes

- packaged snacks are not chosen for nutritional benefits, but for shapes and textures that aid infant development safely
- packaged snacks have benefits for parents, keeping infants occupied and satisfied
- parents choose snack brands that emphasise benefits to babies on their packaging

Role of Brands

Wider trust in branding reinforces positive aspects of packaging

- if a product is sold it is considered safe and appropriate. Simple, 'honest' packaging reinforces this.
- Advertising via social media and freebies strengthens positive associations with packaging
- Ella's kitchen dominates across SEP, providing more than just meals

Key theme: Elements of packaging & branding create confusion over role of follow-on formula

Finding one: Parents have a sense that switching from first formula to follow-on formula is unnecessary, but this understanding is confounded by follow-on formula branding on packaging and related advertising

- When considering milk choices from six months on, many parents discussed follow-on formula as an option. However, some were aware that there was no need to transition from first formulas and cited health visitors as a source of this information.
- However, branding on packaging for follow-ons creates strong signals encouraging parents to think it is the natural next step after first formulas. This confuses parents who are aware that it is unnecessary, but may feel compelled to switch anyway. Package branding and wider advertising achieve this by labelling follow-on as Stage 2 and including health claims.
- It should be noted that no parents who were exclusively breastfeeding suggested that follow-on formulas were a reason they might stop.

“

It is a bit confusing, because all of the ads that you see were obviously for the follow-up milks rather than the new-borns. So yes, that's a bit confusing because it almost makes you feel that oh, you should be giving them the follow-up milk.

Simone, L SEP

“

When he reached I think it was five and a half months we changed him to the follow-on milk, which is for babies that are weaning and starting to eat proper diets as well. So he's now on, I think it's number two, which is the follow-on (...). It just says it still contains all the correct nutrients and vitamins that the baby needs for a balanced diet. But I suppose it doesn't contain as many calories, so that it won't end up being bulked out as much.

Lottie, 1st time parent, M SEP

“

Gabi

They put more iron in the follow-on milk, so that it can then be marketed as a food supplement. But she [the health visitor] said, apart from that, the formulation is almost identical and the first milk is suitable for all of them up to a year old. And I was like, oh my gosh, I didn't even realise. I assumed that the nutrients were somehow different from six months onwards. But she's like, no, it's just a marketing con. So, I've got the first infant milk, the first powdered formula.

IV

Do you know in your mind where you might have got the idea that stage 2 was the one that you had to give from six months and that stage 1 wasn't something you can give up to a year?

Gabi

From advertising. Because I've seen the odd advert on the TV for the follow-on milk, and it must say on the advert, from six months or something. So, I think that's where I got it from.

Gabi, 1st time parent, H SEP

“

I think it was probably the, what you call it, the branding of the Follow On milk is probably what's led me to use it, because it says six to 12 months. Whereas I know that the health visitor said that babies don't actually have to go onto Follow On milk, they can't just stay on the original from birth milk. But I found it easier to use the Follow On milk because that has the information on the back that says the recommended amounts for six months or six to 12 months. So it's just easier to use that one so that I know that she's having enough or not too much.

Amy, L SEP

Key theme: Elements of packaging & branding create confusion over role of follow-on formula

Finding two: Parents consider there to be other benefits to follow-on beyond those noted on packaging

- Beyond whether or not it was strictly necessary, follow-on formulas were considered to confer certain benefits. While one set of benefits - nutritional ones- were noted on the packaging and related advertising, there were also non-packaging-related positives.
- Some parents noted that follow-on was cheaper and it was possible to get advantage / club points when buying it. Thus it made sense to switch to follow-on. Others noted differences in texture and content that they felt were beneficial. These included being thinner than first formula, and having fewer calories, ensuring a baby consuming solid foods would not be overfed.

“

We've started giving him more food now, more solid food, so, I'm hoping that as he's getting more food, I can just change it. By the time he's six months, I could change him to Follow On Milk because it's not, I guess the idea is it's not as thick. Because he's going to have more food, so I don't want to stretch his stomach. That's my worry about milk and stuff like that.

Nadia, M SEP

“

We've been using Cow & Gate Comfort formula, but at six months, he's going on to the follow-on stuff. Purely because it's cheaper than the standard stuff

Kayleigh, 1st time parent, M SEP



Policy Implications

- In light of the real (i.e. cost) and perceived (i.e. nutrient composition) advantages of follow-on-formula, any policy responses must provide clarity on why follow-on is not recommended.

Key theme: Parents look for indications that first packaged foods are age appropriate, healthy and ‘pure’

Finding one: Parents identify proxies for positive attributes on packages

- When parents described what they looked for in a packaged food, they used a similar set of phrases: ‘pure’, ‘simple’, ‘no nasties’, ‘no hidden ingredients’, ‘organic’, and ‘free from sugar, salt, and preservatives’. While some parents scrutinised the ingredients to ensure this was the case, the majority relied on certain proxies such as the look of the packaging or the label of organic.
- Ella’s Kitchen had an almost ubiquitous appeal. Many parents suggested an implicit trust in the brand and packaging, which was considered clear and uncomplicated, plainly stating what the product was and reassuring parents there were no hidden ingredients.
- Many parents preferred products that were savoury rather than sweet and chose products that emphasised savoury flavours, even if the product actually had more sweet ingredients.

“ I probably assumed that because they are targeted for six months plus or six to 12 months whatever, I would assume that they wouldn’t have that [salt & sugar] in. Yes, so I look more at the front of a packet rather than at the back. So I probably for the baby products I don’t look at the ingredients itself but I would look at the front for that to tell me what they contain.

Julia, H SEP



“ I tried to get the ones that were just pure vegetables and didn’t have added fruit puree, because I didn’t want them to be too sweet whilst I was still keeping her on the vegetables.

Abigail, 1st time parent , H SEP

Finding two: age recommendations on packages create confusion while providing security for early introduction of solids

- A number of parents, particularly those who used mostly packaged foods, relied on the brand’s age recommendations to determine what food was safe to give their infant.
- This created a level of confusion, because despite a general awareness that solids should be introduced at six months, parents saw that many recommendations started at four months.
- Parents introducing solids early under health professional recommendation (e.g. due to digestive issues) found the 4-6 month age recommendation provided useful guidance.
- Parents who introduced solids early due to personal preference chose products recommended for 4-6 months, as they were felt to be a safe choice at that age.



“ I think I went to get baby powder, the milk, formula milk, in Boots and it [baby rice] was just next it. And a friend of mine, neighbour with two children, mentioned porridge and baby rice, so I thought, oh. And it said four to six months plus, so I thought, oh, that’s perfect. What you mentioned about age is probably what I got drawn to on the packaging with the Aptamil, because it said four to six months plus. So I was, like, oh right, she’s five months, I can start.

Alisha, 1st time parent, M SEP

Key theme: Parents look for indications that first packaged foods are age appropriate, healthy and ‘pure’

Finding two cont.



Some of the packaging still says four plus months which obviously does contradict the NHS advice, so that's probably a bit confusing for people if they weren't somebody who would go and look at that information or research for themselves. That's probably a bit contradictory, yes. I think probably if I hadn't read that and hadn't followed people weaning their children online on Instagram, I probably would have looked at that packaging myself and thought oh, I'll start weaning at four months and not necessarily know that that wouldn't have been the best time for my baby.

Julia, H SEP

He's had very first taste, so he started Monday because [baby's name] has an egg intolerance. So we were told [by the dietitian] to start slightly before 26 weeks, as evidence shows it can help with allergies, but so far all he's had is literally a tiny little bit. He hasn't been particularly thrilled. He's only had a couple of vegetables.

Samantha, H SEP

Policy Implications

- Regulations could require that the front of packaging matches the ingredients and proportions shown on the back, so that it is clear whether a product has primarily sweet or savoury ingredients.
- Age recommendations need to be looked at to assess whether they should be restricted to six months or include 'under health professional guidance only' for products targeted to under six month olds (e.g., if advised due to certain issues).

Key theme: Parents choose packaged snacks that advertise valued attributes

Finding one: packaged snacks are not chosen for nutritional benefits, but for shapes and textures that aid infant development safely

- Packaged snacks were considered positively by most, helping infants to develop motor skills to pick them up and encouraging self feeding safely and with limited mess.
- Snacks that were branded as promoting self feeding and that emphasised the product's melt-in-the-mouth (choking risk-free) texture were particularly popular.
- Because parents chose snacks for developmental benefits, rather than nutritional ones, they were unlikely to scrutinise packages for nutritional content. Rather, they focused on the age range and looked for proxies that reassured them the snacks had no 'bad' ingredients, such as 'health halo' information and a picture or text to show that the product was good 'finger food'.



“

Yes, she can pick up and they go all soft and gummy, so she's able to eat them all by herself. I don't really have to worry about choking, because they dissolve over time

Carol, L SEP

They're [rusks] quite good, actually, they go all mushy in his mouth, just so that he can still learn how to feed himself as well as me feeding, because that's what he prefers

Leanne, L SEP

Finding two: packaged snacks have benefits for parents, keeping infants occupied and satisfied

- Packaged snacks were provided to keep infants occupied if parents were doing chores, or trying to eat themselves.
- They were also offered to allow infants to fit into the family routine. They allowed infants to take part in the family meal (in a way that allowed parents to eat too). If families were having a treat, infant snacks were offered as an infant-safe alternative.
- Packaging that highlighted age recommendations and the texture of the product suggested that parents were giving their infants something safe and acceptable.

“

My mother-in-law brought those, because we were having a family gathering and she wanted to, she brought us all cake, and wanted to give [baby] something AE

Zoe, 1st time parent, H SEP

“

The main reason she had them yesterday is because we went for a meal, so she sat at the table with us whilst we were having a meal, just eating her little snack sticks so she felt part of the table as such

Abigail, 1st time parent, H SEP



Key theme: Parents choose packaged snacks that advertise valued attributes

Finding two cont.:



I just thought it would be a good idea for hand-to-mouth food because he's starting to do that now, everything goes in babies mouths anyway

Alice, L SEP



The Organix ones, the carrot crisps, I tend to give quite early on, because they sort of melt in the mouth. They're quite nice for them. And they can actually hold those in their hands, as well

Melissa, H SEP



Lottie, M SEP, selection of preferred snacks

Policy implications

- Age recommendations for snack products could be marketed as 12 months + to fit in with guidelines that snacks are not recommended before this age
- Commission longitudinal research into the role that packaged snacks play in helping form snacking habits in later life

Key theme: Wider trust in branding reinforces positive aspects of packaging

Finding one: if a product is sold it is considered safe and appropriate. Simple, 'honest' packaging reinforces this.

- Although not all parents favoured packaged foods, a number of parents displayed an implicit trust of branded products for infants.
- Some parents suggested that the regulations were sufficiently strict that if it was being sold for babies it was automatically safe and appropriate.
- This implicit trust was reinforced by the way ingredients on packages were presented clearly and 'honestly' with no jargon.



I do take a quick look at the ingredients, but like I said last time I reckon with baby food there's not going to be any added nasties like sugar or salt in there otherwise they wouldn't be able to sell them. So I do take a quick look at the ingredients I guess just to double triple check that there's nothing in them. Baby food definitely going to have no bad additions

Jeni, 1st time parent, H SEP



Basically they're [Ella's] easy to read ingredients wise. It is exactly what it says on the packet. There is no added salt, sugar, sweeteners. And obviously with me having to be careful with what I'm feeding [baby] they're just very clear-cut and there's no nonsense, and there are no scientific big words to try and decipher

Alice, L SEP

Finding two: Advertising via social media and freebies strengthens positive associations with packaging

- Advertising that was the most salient to parents was that which came in the form of freebies (specifically the Ella's Kitchen weaning pack which many parents received), or advertised through promoted posts on social media.
- Some parents also got Ella's vouchers in hospital Bounty packs.
- Brands and products were then shared through informal online parent networks and friendship groups.



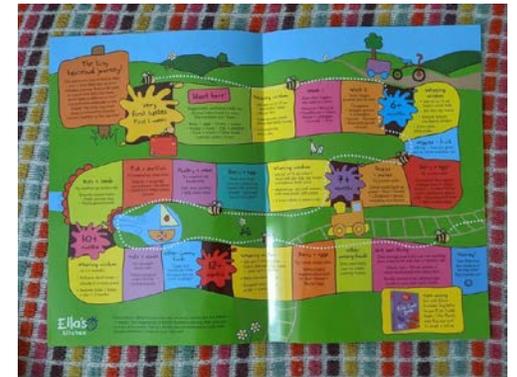
This came in the post. I did it online, I saw somebody posted [it] on one of the Mom's apps, that you can get this for free, just to get some ideas on what to feed him. I like the snakes and ladders kind of thing, you could tell the different types of foods and stuff. It also gives you a timeline, with ages as well

Kayleigh, 1st time parent, M SEP



When you get to the hospital they give you a Bounty pack, which is full of samples and stuff like that. And in there, there were vouchers for Ella's Kitchen. There were little, pretend pouches, almost, that you could take in to Boots and change for pouches of food

Michelle, L SEP



We've got the Ella pack thing. There's like a wall plan or something that of the NCT girls recommended

Michelle, L SEP

Key theme: Wider trust in branding reinforces positive aspects of packaging

Finding three: Ella's kitchen dominates across SEP, providing more than just meals

- Although it was not the only brand mentioned, Ella's Kitchen dominated discussions of packaged foods across SEP. Parents felt positive about the products considering them 'natural', similar to home cooking, and coming in highly convenient pouches. Because they were often available through offers they were not always considered the most expensive option.
- Beyond the products themselves, parents also found the information provided by Ella's, both online and in weaning packs appealing, accessible, and useful.
- While parents looked at the NHS website, for one off pieces of information, they looked to Ella's for ongoing tips and ideas.
- Positivity about the role of Ella's advice in general then reflected back onto the products themselves.

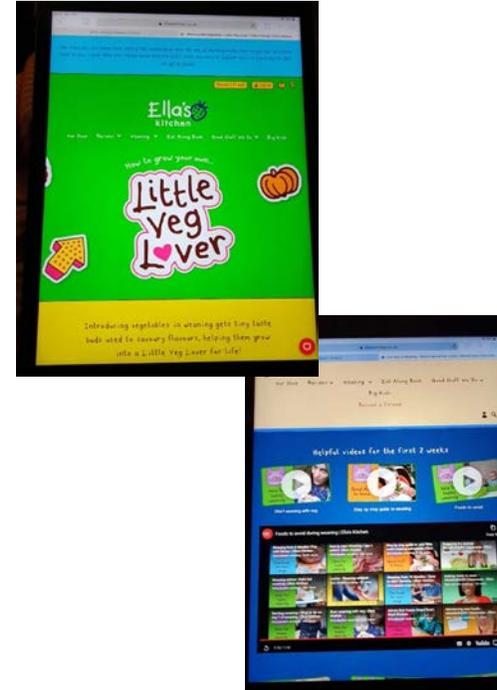


Ella's Kitchen is designed for first time mums if you like, because everything on their packaging is self-explanatory. And it tells you although this is a first finger food remember you've got to supervise them, you've got to brush their teeth, and you've got to do this

Amy, L SEP



Elena, 1st time parent M SEP



Aisha It's their website. I was on their website, just going through what it's like the first day [of introducing solids], what you do, and there's different YouTube videos. So that's quite good, and it just shows a week later, what would you do, what would you attempt?

IV And so have you been using that a lot or is it something that you're just about to start using?

Aisha Through that, I looked at... There was a woman on there, she was steaming cauliflower, and it's got to be really mashed up and then you put it into the NutriBullet. I was just looking at the consistency. It's like mashed potatoes. And different ideas. There's so much.

Aisa, 1st time parent, M SEP

Policy implications

- Consider Start4Life's social media strategy to make it more engaging and appealing so that it becomes a go-to source of advice and inspiration
- Consider trialling a free 'starting solids' pack to raise the profile of Start4Life and give parents up-to-date information and guidelines on paper, including visual guides for food types and consistencies, preparation methods, and safety concerns.

Summary findings – how does packaging influence what infants consume?

Follow on Formula

- While follow-on formula doesn't appear to be a reason for transitioning from breastmilk, confusion remains around its value. Although parents have received advice to say that it is not necessary, its **branding as 'Stage 2' makes it appear a tempting option**. Additionally cheaper costs compared to first formula and **marketing about nutritional content and baby development make it an understandable choice for parents**.

Packaged purees

- While some parents prepared foods for their infants entirely from scratch, many incorporated jars and pouches of puree into their infants' diets. Parents choose packaged purees for a variety of reasons, from being an occasional backup when out, to a main food source. For parents who were anxious about their own preparation skills, and/or had to accommodate for allergies, packaged purees were a trusted product formulated especially for infants. When using packaged purees, **parents look for proxies on packaging to indicate that products were age appropriate, healthy for their infants, and don't contain unwanted ingredients**.

Snacks

- Snacking is a norm across SES. **Parents tend to choose snacks that are branded as 'melt in the mouth', that claim to aid the development of motor skills and self-feeding** without the risk of choking and gagging. Parents also use snacks to keep their infants occupied and engage them in family activities.

Age Recommendations

- **The 4-6 month age recommendation that brands place on packaging is confusing**, as it contradicts NHS guidelines. While some parents rely on their own knowledge and intuition, others prefer to make decisions based on what they see on packaging. **When parents start solids earlier than six months, they rely on this 4-6-month age recommendation as a sign that the product is a safe option**.

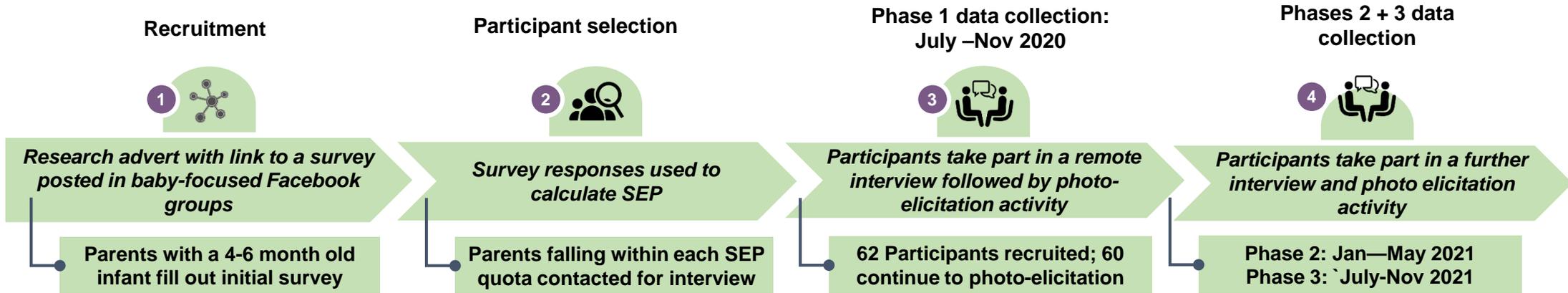
Role of Brands

- **Brands are often trusted and fill an information gap** when parents have questions about how, when, and what to feed their child, or lack confidence in their own food preparation and cooking.

Next steps

- In light of these findings, in the next interview stage, we intend to investigate:
 - Who used follow on and why
 - Perceptions around infant milks (i.e. stage 3 milks)
 - The role of packaged foods in infants' diets
 - How snacking practices develop or change
- We would welcome feedback on any other areas of inquiry.

Appendix 1: Methods



In-depth interview themes:

- Experience of life with an infant
- Impact of COVID-19 on life with an infant
- Perceptions of infant health and wellbeing
- Family shopping and eating practices
- Experience of introducing solids so far
- Feeding decisions so far
- Influences on food choice and infant feeding style
- Broader feelings about feeding and parenting

Interviews are intended to draw out the personal, relational, social, cultural, and economic factors shaping infant feeding decisions

Photo elicitation exercise:

Parents are asked to spend a week taking photos of anything that relates to feeding their infant such as:

- Infant products purchased
- Places parents feed infants
- Things that make it difficult or easy to feed infants

The photos are then discussed in a second interview.

Appendix 2: Calculating Socioeconomic status

- As well as acting as a recruitment tool, our initial survey allowed us to calculate the participants' socioeconomic status. This meant we could recruit an even number of participants from across the socioeconomic spectrum.
- Rather than focusing solely on income, we chose to use a measure of socioeconomic position which also took into account level of parental education, employment type, housing status, IMD, and car ownership.
- We used a validated measure developed by Kininmonth et al¹ to calculate an SEP score. After calculating the highest and lowest possible SES scores, we defined high, low, and medium SEP by creating three equally sized groups within this range.

¹Kininmonth, A.R., Smith, A.D., Llewellyn, C.H., & Fildes, A. (2020). Socioeconomic status and changes in appetite from toddlerhood to early childhood, *Appetite*, 146: 10457



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