

# Mead Johnson to stop making chocolate drink for toddlers

Critics said the formula would promote childhood obesity.

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Mead Johnson Nutrition Co. said Wednesday that it would stop production of a chocolate-flavored toddler formula that has garnered outrage across the mommy blogosphere by parents who said it would contribute to the epidemic of childhood obesity. Mead Johnson said it would keep producing the vanilla version, which is less sugary.

"The chocolate got off on a tangent," said Christopher Perille, spokesman for Glenview, Ill.-based Mead Johnson, which produces the Enfagrow branded formulas. "People were assuming it was for younger ages than it really was. There were a lot of references to baby bottles and infants."

Perille said the company has decided to hold on to the vanilla formula, which carries 18 grams of sugar per serving versus 19 grams in the chocolate formula. The sugar content is on par with that of orange juice or chocolate milk, the company has said, but with added nutrients. Less of the sugar in the vanilla version is "added," he said.

Perille said Mead Johnson's unflavored formula has no added sugar and roughly half the sugar overall of the chocolate version.

"The debate and the misinformation just overwhelmed the nutritional benefits," Perille said.

Some parents lauded the product as a useful way to get their picky eaters to take in nutrients when nothing else worked, and Perille said it's possible that those fans will fly to the shelves to nab the last of the product.

"The mischaracterizations were really driven by 'chocolate,' which tends to be an emotional, evocative kind of product and has the connotation of things that are sweet and less nutritional," Perille said.

In a news release announcing the decision, Mead Johnson stood behind the nutritional benefits of the chocolate formula, which is intended for children who are 12 to 36 months old.

"Beneficial ingredients in our Enfagrow Premium products include iron to help support brain growth and antioxidants and other nutrients to help support the immune system," the company said.

Introduced in February, the chocolate-flavored formula was widely criticized in the blogosphere after Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University, wrote on her influential blog, Food Politics, that the drink would lead children to crave sugary beverages.

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