

Consumer goods

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Unilever plans 'diet' ice cream

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BRITAIN's biggest ice-cream maker is preparing to relaunch one-fifth of its brands as diet products, in a bid to win back consumers who are worried about obesity.

Unilever will introduce diet versions of some of its best-known ice-cream brands, including Magnum and Carte d'Or.

The company has also pledged to scrap E-numbers and other unhealthy ingredients, such as highly refined sugars, within three years.

It plans to relaunch the brands in April.

James Hill, chairman of Unilever Ice Cream and Frozen Food, said: "We are responding to increasing concern about obesity, and we think consumers' concern about the issue will continue to grow."

"One of the great myths is that you can't sell a diet ice cream," he said. "We are going to debunk that. About 20% of our total ice-cream portfolio will be changed in a significant way. We think we will get a competitive advantage."

The company, whose other brands include Cornetto, Solero and Twister, is now looking for healthier ingredients.

Hill said: "All of our ingredients are impeccable, but we want to take that further. We are moving, for example, towards a higher unsaturated fat profile. We want to be above reproach."

Hill is aiming to increase sales by up to 6%, although he believes Unilever can double this rate among diet-conscious consumers with the upcoming launches.

He is also planning to roll out a network of Walls ice-cream parlours across the country. This is to combat the fall in sales from small corner shops, whose number is declining. The ice-cream boss intends to open 100 of the parlours within five years.

"We are taking it step-by-step," he said. "It will probably be one, then five, then twenty, fifty and a hundred."