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NEW YORK (AP) — Hershey said its profit rose 4.4 percent in the first quarter but noted that sales growth was weaker than expected.

[The Hershey Co.](#) [1], which makes Kit Kat, Reese's and Ice Breakers, noted that there were "irregular purchasing patterns" at major retailers during the period in the U.S. and that people made fewer trips to certain stores. It also noted that it lost a bit of market share in the chocolate business because of the timing of its product launches.

The company said it expects sales growth to accelerate over the rest of the year as it launches a variety of new products in the U.S., including Hershey's spreads and Brookside Crunchy Clusters. Overseas, it said it will keep building on the momentum of Hershey's chocolates and Kisses.

For the period ended March 30, the company earned \$252.5 million, or \$1.11 per share. Not including one-time items, it earned \$1.15 per share, topping the \$1.14 per share Wall Street expected.

A year ago, it earned \$241.9 million, or \$1.06 per share.

Revenue rose to \$1.87 billion, shy of the \$1.91 billion

The company said it still expects overall sales growth of 5 to 7 percent for the year, excluding the impact of currency exchange rates.

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