

# A sugar tax of sugary sweetened drinks

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## **A sugar tax on sugary sweetened drinks**

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**By Dr Brighton Chireka**

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A sugar tax has been announced by George Osborne the UK Chancellor on sugary drinks. Under the sugar tax plans, soft drinks companies will pay a levy on drinks with added sugar from April 2018. The sugar tax will not be levied on milk-based drinks or fruit juices. The sugar tax will be imposed on soft drinks company producing drinks containing more than a teaspoon of added sugar per 100ml.

### **The sugar tax will be levied in two bands:**

*A higher band for sugary drinks containing more than 8g per 100ml of added sugar. This includes Coca Cola , Red Bull to just mention a few drinks . 8p will be added to the price of a can.*

*A lower band for drinks containing above 5g per 100ml . This include drinks such as Fanta , Sprite , Dr Pepper and Tonic water . 6p will be added to a can of bottle .*

*Pure fruit juices and milk-based drinks including coffee or hot chocolates , are exempt because milk has ' health benefits'. This is controversial as some of the drinks that have been left contain shocking amount of sugar.*

I welcome this move in the fight against obesity but I still think that more needs to be done. The government is doing its part and we expect the food industry to be honest in their food labelling. The last part is ourselves as we need to monitor what goes into our bodies. Having eaten we must make sure that we are burning the excess energy in our bodies.

### **Why talking about sugar ?**

We are what we eat and do after eating so we need to have a healthy balanced diet . We are recommended to eat fewer foods and drinks that are high in sugars. Sugary foods and drinks can cause tooth decay , especially if taken between meals .

All sugars are carbohydrates found naturally in most foods. Their main nutritional value is in providing energy. However, sugar is also added to lots of foods such as sweets, chocolate, cakes, and some fizzy and juice drinks.

### **What are carbohydrates?**

Carbohydrates are sugars that break down inside the body to create glucose. Glucose is moved around the body in the blood and is the primary source of energy for the brain, muscles, and other essential cells. There are two main types of carbohydrates, simple and complex. The more refined the carbohydrate the more quickly it is converted to glucose and released into the bloodstream. This can cause peaks and troughs in blood sugar levels and results in variable energy levels – refined or simple carbohydrates should make up only about 10% of our daily carbohydrate intake. Complex carbohydrates, such as those found in starchy foods such as Sadza, potatoes, bread, rice, whole grains, pasta and oats release glucose more slowly into the bloodstream providing more stable and sustainable energy levels to the body.

Eating foods with high sugar can contribute to us becoming overweight. Being overweight can increase our risk of health conditions such as: heart disease , type 2 diabetes , stroke

## **How much sugar should we take per day?**

Added sugars must not make up more than 5% of the energy we get from food and drink every day. We are therefore advised to take about 30g ( 7 teaspoons) of sugar a day for those of us aged 11 and over. Children should have less – no more than 19g a day for children aged 4 to 6 years old (5 teaspoons), and no more than 24g (6 teaspoons) for children aged 7 to 10 years old.

### ***(Please note a teaspoon of sugar is approximately 4g of sugar )***

Fruit juice and honey can also count as added sugars, as they're sometimes added to foods to make them sweeter. Fruit juice is still a healthy choice (one 150ml serving counts towards our 5 A DAY). However, the sugars can damage our teeth, so it's best to drink it with a meal and no more than one serving a day. This is because sugars are released during the juicing process. Sugars in whole pieces of fruit are less likely to cause tooth decay because they are contained within the food. We should not cut down on fruit as it's an important part of a healthy, balanced diet.

## **Why are we not happy that coffee and hot chocolates are left out in sugar tax?**

A survey by group called action on sugar found out that 98% of hot flavoured drinks would receive a red (high) label for excessive levels of sugars per serving and 35% contain same amount or more sugar than a can of Coca Cola. This sugar tax is leaving out the worst offenders such as Starbuck's Hot Mulled Fruit - Grape with Chai, Orange and Cinnamon Venti that contains a whopping 25 teaspoons of sugar - more than THREE times the maximum ADULT daily intake of free sugars ( 7 teaspoons a day )

See the results of sugar in hot drinks

[SURVEY ON HOT DRINKS](#)

## **How can we cut down on sugar?**

It is important to try and make small adjustments to our diet and lifestyle in order to reduce the amount of sugar that we consume each day.

It is interesting to see that in fact it does not take a long time for our taste buds to readjust to foods with less sugar, and that once they have, the foods that we used to eat appear far too sweet.

### **Check food labels**

I suggest that we get into the habit of just checking the nutritional information on food labels . This will help us to check how much sugar the food contains. Sugar may have several names but in most labels we tend to find this phrase "Carbohydrates (of which sugars)". When we find this phrase we must look at how much sugar the product contains for every 100g:

- *more than 22.5g of total sugars per 100g is high  
5g of total sugars or less per 100g is low*
- *If the amount of sugars per 100g is between 5 and 22.5 that's a medium level of sugars. It is advisable to pick the foods with less added sugar, or go for the low-sugar version.*
- *We need to cut down on sugary, fizzy drinks, juice drinks and go for water or unsweetened fruit juice. We need to remember to dilute fruit juices for children to further reduce the sugar.*
- *We need to gradually reduce the amount of sugar we put in hot drinks or cereals until we have cut it out altogether. I have managed personally to cut my sugar intake in tea or coffee as I do not put any sugar at all. It's hard at first but you will get used to it as you drink more and more tea without sugar.*
- *choose wholegrain breakfast cereals, but not those coated with sugar or honey.*
- *Avoid adding sugar, salt or too much butter to any of your cooking. Instead, add flavour by using herbs, spices or lemon juice.*
- *Try to stay away from condiments such as ketchup or sweet chili sauce, which are very high in sugar (up to 30%).*
- *Try to grill, bake or steam foods rather than frying them.*
- *Try to substitute cakes, biscuits or ice cream with fruit salads, sugar-free jelly or simply a couple of squares of dark chocolate for dessert.*
- *Avoid choosing fruits that are canned in syrup, instead choose fruits that are canned in their own juice.*

We have sugar everywhere so it is tempting but we must not jeopardise our health. Having indulged in these high sugar drinks we need to make sure that we do something to burn them. I recommend that we keep active and have an exercise routine. No fizzy drinks when exercising as we may add up taking more sugars that we are trying to burn out. Water remains the best and the sooner we learn to drink it the better.

I would love to hear how you are managing to cut down on sugars in your diet.

This article was compiled by **Dr Brighton Chireka** who is a GP and a Health Commissioner in South Kent Coast in the United Kingdom. You can contact him at: [info@docbeecee.co.uk](mailto:info@docbeecee.co.uk) and can read more of his work on his blog at [DR CHIREKA'S BLOG](#)

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