



Is a Sugar Tax the Best Solution to Obesity?

Increased use of sugary food and drink plays a big role in New Zealand's high obesity rate. It also contributes to other health problems, such as type two diabetes and dental issues.

Taxes on soft drinks have been implemented by some countries to help reduce obesity rates.

The effects that both added sugar and sugar in processed food and drinks are causing has gained more public interest and concern over the last few years, and when looking back over the last decade, the problem is getting worse, not better.

A tax such as a sugar tax is designed to discourage unhealthy behaviour. Much of the negativity around this form of tax has suggested that promoting positive behaviour has more impact, and that this tax removes freedom of choice.

Why soft drinks?

Considering the abundance of processed food, it has been asked why the focus is on just soft drinks. There are a couple of reasons given for this focus; Drinking is something we all do, and studies have found those who drink soft drinks tend to do so every day and not see consumption as 'food'. Another reason is the volume of sugar in a single serve, and a serve without any nutritional benefits at all.

Mexico

A 1% tax was added to soft drinks in Mexico in 2014 and although there are sceptics on its success, a study published in January in the British Medical Journal shows that sales of the taxed beverages in Mexico fell by an average of 6% in 2014.

Now UK

In 2016, the British government announced it would be adding a tax to soft drinks from 2018. The tax will be around 18 pence - 24 pence per litre (NZ 32-42 cents). In a further step to improve its citizen's health, the income from the sugar tax will be spent on primary school sports.

What about NZ?

While medical experts in NZ are pushing for a similar tax in NZ, health minister Jonathan Coleman has no plans for implementing one, instead intending to wait for more evidence from countries such as Mexico.

Sugar provides calories, but has no nutritional benefit so there is no health benefit whatsoever in consuming it. It's about taste and convenience, so regardless of any tax, it's worth reducing intake, especially in products such as soft drinks.

Where does exercise fit?

One of the main fuel sources for exercise is glucose, which is stored sugar in our bodies. While reducing sugar intake is one part of the health equation, exercise can also assist by managing sugar levels as well as the countless other health benefits.

A sensible place to start is by combining a diet low in processed food and sugar, combined with regular activity as the path to long-term health.

For more advice and direction to improve your health talk to your registered exercise professional, as they can offer guidance and refer you to sources of information, and other nutritional professionals that you can trust.

Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

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NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) - Independent not for profit quality mark of exercise professionals and facilities. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the "warrant of fitness check" that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver safe exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

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Exercise Association of New Zealand - Not for profit exercise industry representative organisation. Its *mission is to proactively support a sustainable exercise and fitness industry in New Zealand by growing participation in structured exercise through advocacy, information and industry standards.*

