

Soft drinks are not a cause of diabetes – briefing

A Ten Minute Rule Motion was submitted by Rt Hon Keith Vaz MP for debate in the House of Commons on Wednesday 18 April 2012.

DIABETES PREVENTION (SOFT DRINKS)

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a programme of research into diabetes prevention; to require manufacturers of soft drinks to reduce the sugar content of soft drinks by 4%; to make provision for a mechanism through which manufacturers of soft drinks are required through reinvestment of part of their profits to support the research programme from 2012; and for connected purposes.

BSDA statement

Soft drinks are not a cause of diabetes so it is wrong to subject soft drinks manufacturers to discriminatory taxation. Soft drinks provide only about 3 per cent of the calories in the average diet, and there is a wide range of diet, low calorie and no added sugar drinks for those who prefer them. It makes no sense to require a reduction in the sugar content of soft drinks given that there are so many drinks with no added sugar at all: they make up more than 60 per cent of the market, up from 30 per cent 20 years ago.

About diabetes

Diabetes is a complex disease with many known risk factors, including family history, age, being overweight or obese, and ethnic group. (source NHS Choices)

Diabetes UK states that “Eating sweets and sugar does not cause diabetes, but eating a lot of sugary and fatty foods can lead to being overweight.” (source Diabetes UK, causes and risk factors)

Obesity, as a risk factor, arises from an excess of calories in the diet over calories expended in exercise. To deal with obesity means to address both sides of that equation, calories out as well as calories in, lifestyle as well as diet.

Thinking about diet, all calories are equal: no particular type of food or drink provides a type of calories that are more likely to cause obesity. Any food or drink may be consumed within a balanced diet, but all must be consumed in moderation.

In particular, in the case of sugar-sweetened soft drinks, a review of the available scientific evidence by Sigrid Gibson in 2008 noted that sugar-sweetened drinks “are by nature a source of energy but there is little evidence from epidemiological studies that they are more obesogenic than any other source of energy. Assertions that SSD are a disproportionate cause of excess body weight and/or that their avoidance would be effective in preventing weight gain are, in my opinion, not well substantiated by the science.” (source “Sugar-sweetened soft drinks and obesity: a systematic review of the evidence from observational studies and interventions”, Nutrition Research Reviews (2008), 21, 134–147)

The author of one review of the science concluded there is no biological plausibility for a unique effect for soft drinks. He noted that “the associations between sugar-sweetened beverages and obesity must be viewed as circumstantial because biological plausibility, based on known physiologic mechanisms regulating food intake and energy balance, and short-term experimental studies, does not support cause and effect conclusions.” (source Anderson, G.H. and D. Woodend, Consumption of sugars and the regulation of short-term satiety and food intake. Am J Clin Nutr, 2003, 78(4): p.843S-849S.)

About soft drinks

Soft drinks include carbonated drinks, still and dilutable drinks, fruit juices and smoothies, and bottled waters. Average annual consumption per capita is 235 litres, or 2.5 glasses per day. (source BSDA 2011 UK Soft Drinks Report, data from Zenith International)

Drinks without added sugar are available for people who prefer them. More than 60 per cent of the market is now made up of diet, low calorie and no added sugar drinks, up from 30 per cent 20 years ago. (source BSDA 2011 UK Soft Drinks Report, data from Zenith International) The soft drinks industry also offers 100 per cent natural drinks and functional drinks for those who want them.

Since 1984, the consumption of regular soft drinks has fallen from 96 litres per year per person to 89 litres. In the same period, consumption of soft drinks without added sugar has risen from 10 litres to 145 litres. (data from Zenith International)

Soft drinks carry nutritional information, including calorie content, in a clear format on the front of the pack. The GDA format enables consumers easily to compare one product with another and choose the one most suitable for their diet. Soft drinks are available in a wide range of pack sizes, so that people can choose the pack size most suitable for them.

Soft drinks provide about 3 per cent of the calories in the average diet. (source NDNS, 2008/9)

Soft drinks offer a welcome alternative to alcoholic drinks in many social situations.

About the soft drinks industry

The soft drinks industry employs more than 12,000 people (source BSDA 2012 UK Soft Drinks Responsibility Report, online at <http://bit.ly/l15EZH>) and its products have an annual retail value of £13,880 million (source BSDA 2011 UK Soft Drinks Report, data from Zenith International, online at <http://bit.ly/dY8SOc>).

The soft drinks industry has adopted a policy whereby it does not advertise soft drinks containing added sugar to children; a number of companies go further and will not advertise products of any kind to children. Companies that offer diet drinks within their range are also devoting more of their promotional expenditure to their lower calorie drinks.

For more information, please contact

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