



*World Consumer Rights Day 2015:  
Consumers Rights to Healthy Food*

*Briefing no. 3*

*Reducing sugar consumption*

**About Consumers International**

Established in 1960, CI is the world federation of consumer rights groups. Our goal is to ensure that consumer rights can never be ignored. With over 240 Member organisations spanning 120 countries, we serve as the only independent and authoritative global voice for consumer rights. We are a registered UK charity.

***As part of a package of measures required to protect and promote healthy diets CI is calling for the introduction of national targets for the gradual reduction of sugar content in processed foods and for the use of fiscal tools to encourage a reduction in consumption of high sugar products.***

## What is the problem with sugar?

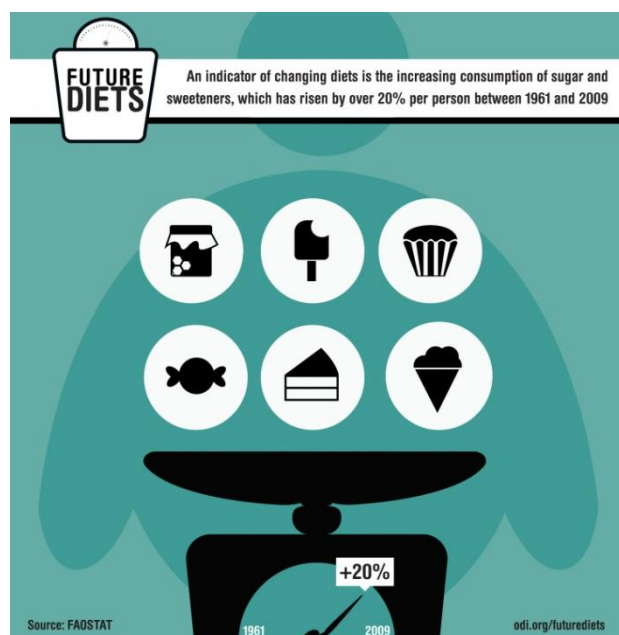
**Modern diets are increasingly sweet thanks to the high amount of added sugars in popular processed foods.**

**Excessive sugar intake has been found to have serious health impacts.**

Global intake of sugars increased by 20% between 1966 and 2009.<sup>1</sup> Sugar intake has risen particularly rapidly in some low and middle income countries. Over the last fifty years sugar in the diet has tripled in China, doubled in Egypt and has become 5 times higher in Thailand.<sup>2</sup>

Sugar added to processed food is responsible for most of this increase.<sup>3,4</sup> A handful of highly successful processed foods can hide very high levels of sugar, and can replace other healthier alternatives at meals, becoming key vehicles of added sugar intake. For instance, sweetened cereal, juices, long life bread and pastries, spreads and sweeteners are popular at breakfast; sugar sweetened beverages often replace other drinks such as water and milk<sup>5</sup>; high-sugar snack bars and ready-made meals and sauces are other good examples.

Excessive consumption of sugar is a major risk factor for obesity. Sugar contributes to caloric overload – empty, hidden calories from sugar-rich products are associated with weight gain<sup>6</sup>. This is particularly clear in the case of sugared drinks<sup>7</sup>. There is some evidence that a sugary diet can compel consumers to eat more<sup>8</sup>. High sugar diets are also a major cause of type 2 diabetes and have been linked with rising rates of metabolic syndrome, and thus heart disease<sup>9</sup>. - 1 in every 10 adults is now affected by diabetes.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Keats, S. and Wiggins, S. (2014) *Future Diets*. ODI Report. ODI.

<sup>2</sup> FAOSTAT [www.faostat.fao.org](http://www.faostat.fao.org)

<sup>3</sup> Hawkes, C. et al. (2007). 'Globalisation, food and nutrition transitions. Background paper of the Globalisation Knowledge Network', Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Geneva: World Health Organization.

<sup>4</sup> Augusto-Monteiro et al. (2010). 'Increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods and likely impact on human health: evidence from Brazil'. *Public Health Nutrition* 14(1), 5–13.

<sup>5</sup> Popkin, B. (2011) 'Contemporary nutritional transition: determinants of diet and its impact on body composition', *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 70 (1): 82-91.

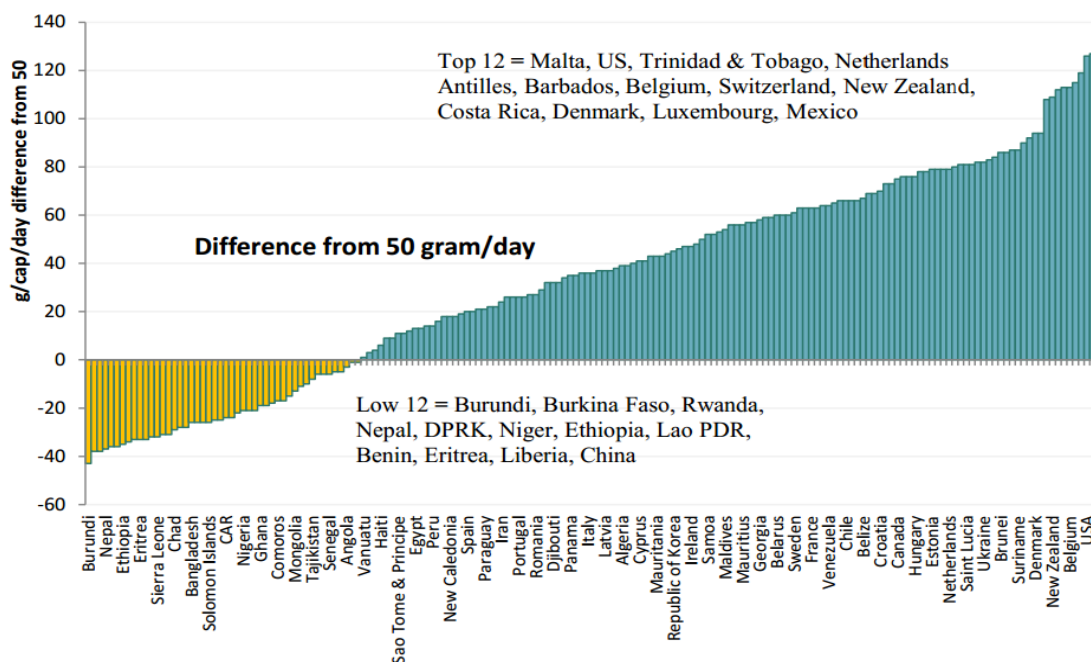
<sup>6</sup> Te Morenga, S; Mallard, S, Mann, J (2013) Dietary sugars and body weight: systematic review and meta-analyses of randomised controlled trials and cohort studies. *BMJ* 346:e7492.

<sup>7</sup> Malik, VS, Schulze M and Hu F.B. (2006) "Intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and weight gain: a systematic review", *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 84 (2): 274-288.

<sup>8</sup> Garber, A.K. & Lustig, R.H. (2011) 'Is fast food addictive?', *Current Drug Abuse Reviews* 4 (3): 140-145.

<sup>9</sup> Vartanian LR, Schwartz MB, Brownell KD. (2007) Effects of soft drink consumption on nutrition and health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Am J Public Health* 97:667-675.

<sup>10</sup> Danaei G. et al (2011) *Global Burden of Metabolic Risk Factors of Chronic Diseases Collaborating Group (Blood Glucose)*. *Lancet* 378(9785):31-40.



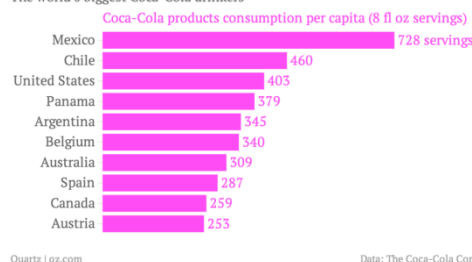
Source: FAOSTAT.

Note: Labels on the horizontal axis are examples – not every country is listed.

The 2014 the World Health Organisation released draft guidelines, which reduced its recommended maximum consumption of sugar from 10% to only 5% of total calories consumed. At a national level, few countries have set formal or informal upper limits. A 5% intake is equivalent to roughly 25g per day for the average adult. The table above<sup>11</sup> shows the difference from 50 grams in daily per capita sugar consumption in 176 countries in 2009.

The main type of policy that addresses sugar in particular is taxes on sugar sweetened products, such as soda. Other types of policies, such as those restricting marketing of unhealthy food to children, attempt to limit consumption of foods high in sugar, along with salt, fat, saturated fat and energy content. New York City came very close to imposing a ban on selling sodas over 16 ounces (0.5 litres) in volume in 2013. Under the plan, all restaurants, fast-food joints, delis, movie theatres, sports stadiums and food carts would have been barred from selling sugar-sweetened drinks in cups larger than that size. The ban was blocked by the New York Supreme Court before it came into force.

The world's biggest Coca-Cola drinkers



Quartz | qz.com

Data: The Coca-Cola Company

## What is CI calling for?

CI is campaigning for a Global Convention to protect and promote healthy diets<sup>12</sup>, using a similar mechanism to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. A Global Convention would commit governments to a package of policy measures designed to help consumers eat more healthily. This would include: restrictions on food marketing to children; nutrition labelling; provision of better food in schools and public institutions and consideration of fiscal tools to promote healthier eating. A Global Convention should also include measures to reduce consumption of free sugars, which are those that are added to foodstuffs rather than naturally occurring sugars in fruit and vegetables:

<sup>11</sup> ODI (2014) *Future Diets*. ODI. Available at: <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8776.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Consumers International and World Obesity Federation, (2014) *Recommendations Towards a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets* [online]. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/nkafurp>

## Reformulation of products to reduce fat, sugar and salt content

Targets should be set by the government, via a process free from any conflict of interest. Those products that make the largest contribution to the population's sugar intake should be prioritised. Guidance should also be provided on responsible and realistic portion size.

## Use of fiscal measures

Governments should consider using economic measures, for instance taxes or levies on high sugar food categories, such as sodas. This is particularly effective where any revenue is earmarked for nutrition initiatives<sup>13</sup>

## Examples of sugar consumption reduction policies

### France

In 2012, the government introduced an excise duty on drinks with added sugar and artificial sweeteners, including sodas, fruit drinks, flavoured waters and 'light' drinks. The tax is around 11 euro cents per 1.5 litres of soda and used to raise revenue for the general budget.

### Hungary

A "public health tax" adopted in 2012 is applied on the salt, sugar and caffeine content of various categories of ready-to-eat foods, including soft drinks (both sugar- and artificially-sweetened), energy drinks and pre-packaged sugar-sweetened products. The tax is applied at varying rates. Soft drinks, for example, are taxed at \$0.24 per litre, and other sweetened products at \$0.47 per litre.

The Hungarian Aqua Promoting Programme in the Young (HAPPY), run by the National Institute for Food and Nutrition Science, aims to reduce the excessive consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and to popularise water consumption among elementary school pupils. HAPPY was organized for the fifth year in 2014. More than 41,000 pupils from 135 schools participated in this programme in 2013.

### Tonga

As of 2013, soft drinks containing sugar or sweeteners are taxed at 1 Tonga Pa'anga per litre (around \$0.50).

### Mexico

In December 2013, the Mexican legislature passed two new taxes as part of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes (Estrategia Nacional para un Mexico sin Obesidad). They entered into force on 1 January 2014. An excise duty of 1 peso (\$0.80) per litre applies to sugary drinks. Sugary drinks are defined under the new law as all drinks with added sugar, excluding milks or yoghurts. Preliminary price monitoring indicates that the price of sugary drinks has increased by around 10%. The revenue from the sugary drink tax should be allocated to fund programmes addressing malnutrition, obesity and obesity-related chronic diseases, as well as access to drinking water (6th transitory article, Federal Law on Income for the Fiscal Year 2014); however, the revenue is currently being allocated to the general budget. A sales tax of 8% applies to foods with high caloric density, defined as equal to or more than 275 calories per 100 grams. The food product categories that are affected by the tax include crisps/chips and snacks, confectionary, chocolate and cacao based products, puddings, and peanut and hazelnut butters.

## Ideas for actions

### Survey sugar levels in popular products

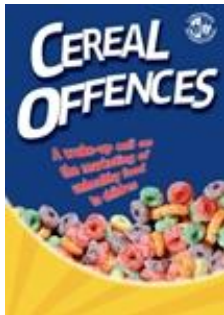
Survey sugar levels in popular processed, pre-packaged foods likely to be high in sugar, such as breakfast cereals, snack bars, flavoured yogurts and sweetened drinks. Sugar levels can be obtained from nutrition labels where present. In some countries nutrient levels for sugar are provided on some company websites. Those with greater budgets can consider independent testing.

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<sup>13</sup> Brownell, K. et al. (2009) "The Public Health and Economic Benefits of Taxing Sugar-Sweetened Beverages" Health Policy Report, NEJM 361: 1599-1605.

Compare findings against national food based dietary guidelines (if your country has them) or against the WHO guideline on sugar which recommends that adults obtain no more 5% of total calories from sugar. This works out as a daily dose of 25g or 6 teaspoons for the average adult.

You may also be able to compare your findings to show change over time. In January 2015 UK group, Action on Sugar revisited a survey conducted in 2012 by CI member Which? in which 50 cereals were examined. Some cereals had either increased in sugar levels or stayed the same since 2012, and 14 out of 50 cereals contained a third or more ( $\geq 33.3\text{g}/100\text{g}$ ) sugar, or 8 teaspoons per 100g.



Compare your findings against other countries. In many instances, companies operating in multiple countries will vary sugar and salt levels in different countries. This was one of the findings of the CI report, *Cereal Offences* in 2008. Use the CI food list and/or your contact in your local regional office to share your results with members. In some instances, data may already be out there from previous surveys so do ask!



### Campaign for sugar taxes

In Mexico CI member El Poder del Consumidor campaigned for a soda tax as part of a large coalition of charities “Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria.” The campaign included a range of high impact public protests; advertisements which used graphic images of the effects of diabetes reminiscent of anti-tobacco campaigns; and legal complaints against drink companies engaged in misleading advertisements. The campaign has resulted in government enacting a tax of 10% per litre of sugar-sweetened drink. Campaigners have asked for all revenue to be used for prevention, including the installation of drinking water fountains in schools and public spaces, but tax revenue has not yet been ring-fenced.

### Further reading

All policy examples listed here were taken from World Cancer Research Fund International’s Nourishing Framework. See the website for more: <http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-framework>

Interactive world map showing prevalence of raised blood glucose from the World Health Organization: [http://gamapserver.who.int/gho/interactive\\_charts/ncd/risk\\_factors/blood\\_glucose\\_prevalence/atlas.html](http://gamapserver.who.int/gho/interactive_charts/ncd/risk_factors/blood_glucose_prevalence/atlas.html)

UK campaign group Action on Sugar has lots background information and details of its cereal survey, including data: <http://www.actiononsugar.org/>

See the Which? report on cereal bars <http://www.which.co.uk/documents/pdf/cereal-bars-table-293496.pdf>  
Spanish campaign alliance pushing for measures to address the sale and marketing of sugar: [www.25gramos.org](http://www.25gramos.org)

Read more about the Mexican campaign <http://alianzasalud.org.mx/>