

Reducing sugar content in drinks could prevent one million cases of obesity

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Reducing sugar content in sugar sweetened drinks (including fruit juices) in the UK by 40 per cent over five years could prevent one million cases of obesity, according to research by Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). This would in turn prevent around 300,000 cases of type 2 diabetes, over two decades.

Based on the UK's salt reduction experience, which has seen [salt content](#) in many [food products](#) successfully reduced by 40 per cent over five years, the researchers studied the potential effects of a similar reduction in added sugars.

The study, published in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, used data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey rolling programme and British Soft Drinks Association annual reports. The researchers calculated sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) consumption level and its contribution to free sugar and energy intakes in the UK population.

The calculations showed that a 40% reduction in free sugars added to SSBs over five years would

lead to an average reduction in [energy intake](#) of 38.4 kcal (calories) per day by the end of the fifth year and this would lead to an average reduction in body weight of 1.20kg in adults. This would result in a reduction of 500,000 overweight adults and one million obese adults, and in turn prevent around 300,000 cases of [obesity](#)-related type 2 diabetes over the next two decades.

The predicted impact was greater in adolescents, young adults, and individuals from low income families who consume more SSBs.

The authors add that previous research has shown that the calories lost from SSBs are unlikely to be replaced by other sources. The reduction in added sugar also has little influence on the cost and price of the product and is therefore unlikely to affect sales and profit of the soft drink industry. They say it is therefore potentially attractive to industry, although some—for instance, the sugar industry—may be resistant.

Professor Graham MacGregor and his co-authors from QMUL's Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine said: "The proposed strategy could lead to a profound reduction in energy intake from sugar-sweetened beverages and could therefore lower the prevalence of overweight, obesity, and type 2 diabetes in the long term. These findings provide strong support for the implementation of the proposed strategy."

The authors say that reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in the long term can be difficult for individuals because of the advertising power of industry. They add: "Our proposed strategy provides an innovative and practical way to gradually reduce energy intake from sugar-sweetened beverages and its combination with other strategies, including a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, would produce a more powerful effect."

More information: Yuan Ma et al. Gradual reduction of sugar in soft drinks without substitution as a strategy to reduce overweight, obesity, and type 2 diabetes: a modelling study, *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/S2213-8587\(15\)00477-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-8587(15)00477-5)

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