



# Liquid Candy: Working Together to Reduce Consumption of Sugary Drinks

## What needs to be done?

**Governments and organizations should take action to reduce the consumption of sugary drinks to help reduce the incidence of associated chronic diseases.**

## What are sugary drinks?

These include soda/soft drinks, fruit drinks (punch, cocktail), juices (including 100% fruit juice) sport drinks, sweetened coffees, sweetened milks, teas, and waters and energy drinks.

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Heart & Stroke recommends that an individual's total intake of free sugars not exceed 10% of total daily calorie (energy) intake, which is in alignment with the World Health Organization recommendations. For the average 2000 calorie diet, 10% of total calorie intake would represent a maximum of 48 grams, or 12 teaspoons, of sugar per day.

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## Why are sugary drinks an issue?

### Sugary drink consumption is high

- Sugary drinks are the single largest contributor of sugar in the diet. About 20% of the calories from pre-packaged foods and beverages in Canada come from free or added sugars. In pre-packaged beverages alone, 70% of the calories come from free or added sugars.



- Between 2004-2015, the sales of some sugary drinks have increased significantly: energy drinks (638%), sweetened coffees (579%), flavoured waters (527%), sweetened teas (36%), flavoured milks (21%) and sports drinks (4%).
- In Canada, about 1/4 of those 5 to 19 years of age reported daily consumption of sugary drinks. Research shows that soda, energy and sports drinks are the top calorie source among North Americans ages 12 to 50.
- As children get older, they drink more sugar from soft drinks. Boys' average daily consumption of regular soft drinks is 68 grams at ages 4 to 8 years and increases to 376 grams at ages 14 to 18 years. Among girls the increase is from 47 to 179 grams.
- The total volume per capita of sugary drinks available to the average Canadian per year is 162 litres. That is roughly 444 ml per Canadian per day. Taking into account the sugar content of a standard sized soft drink (355 ml), this would exceed the daily recommended free sugar threshold proposed by Heart & Stroke and World Health Organization.
- Beverage companies in North America spent \$866 million in 2013 to market unhealthy drinks.

## Portion sizes have increased

- The average 32 ounce soft drink (standard large size) has 374 calories and 102 grams of added sugar. A standard soft drink can (355 mL) contains about 40 grams (10 teaspoons) of sugar.
- Sugary drink portion sizes have increased over time. Originally, a 16 ounce bottle size was intended to serve three people. The same volume is now the standard small, single serving size fountain drink. Today, single serving size fountain drinks can be as high as 40 ounces in Canada.

## Sugary drinks and health

- Sugary drinks contain empty calories with little to no nutritional benefit.
- Among adolescents, soft drink intake is associated with lower intakes of milk, calcium and other essential nutrients.
- Individuals who drink sugary drinks do not feel as full as they do if they eat the same number of calories from solid food. Furthermore, they do not compensate by eating less, which can cause excess calorie intake.
- Sugar loaded drinks and excess sugar consumption are associated with chronic disease including obesity, heart disease and stroke, diabetes, dental caries and

some cancers. Drinking just one can of soda per day can increase the risk of developing diabetes by 22% and increase the risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

- With every additional sugary beverage a child drinks daily, the odds of becoming obese increase by 60%. Children who consume sugary drinks during infancy are more likely to have obesity within six years. There is emerging research to show that drinking 100% fruit juice regularly at a young age increases the odds of becoming overweight in later years.
- The obesity epidemic shows no sign of relenting and currently 62% of adults and 32% of children and youth 6 to 17 years in Canada are overweight or obese. Obesity is a major public health concern because overweight and obese individuals are more likely to develop serious health problems such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. Obesity can reduce lifespan and quality of life.
- Obesity has become an epidemic and shows no signs of going down. Prevention of obesity can help reduce treatment costs. Public health experts assert that sugary drinks are a leading driver of obesity and other chronic diseases.
- Childhood obesity has tripled over the last 30 years. This could be the first generation of children to have a shorter lifespan than their parents as a result of premature death related to chronic disease including obesity.
- Access to clean, potable and affordable drinking water continues to be a challenge for many Indigenous communities. As a result, Indigenous people in Canada often turn to sugary drinks for hydration, which are usually less expensive than milk and bottled water.
- While the causes of chronic disease are numerous, poor diet and excess caloric intake are the leading factors for chronic disease and obesity. Larger portion sizes contribute to the overconsumption of calories and excess body weight.
- Treatment of chronic diseases and other illnesses takes up 67% of health care spending and costs the Canadian economy \$190 billion annually in direct and indirect costs. These numbers are expected to grow as chronic disease rates are increasing by approximately 14% each year.



- It is projected that over the next twenty five years, sugary drink consumption in Canada will be responsible for over 63,000 deaths, 300,000 cases of ischemic heart disease and almost 40,000 strokes, and cost the Canadian healthcare system over \$50 billion in direct costs.

## Why now?

### Public support

- The time is right – the public supports action on sugary drinks. In a 2013 Ipsos Reid poll of Canadians:
  - 88% agree that large serving sizes of sugary drinks can lead to bad health.
  - 94% consider over consumption of sugary drinks to be an important contributor to obesity among Canadians.
  - 79% agree that large sized sugary drinks in restaurants and convenience stores are usually offered at little additional cost in order to encourage people to spend and consume more.
  - 63% would support a plan to eliminate large sugary drink sizes in restaurants and large sugary fountain drinks in convenience stores as a way to improve health.
- A 2017 Pollara poll found that approximately 70% of Canadians are supportive of a levy on companies that make sugary drinks provided some of the resulting revenues are dedicated to supporting healthy living initiatives.

### Governments are taking action

- The 2012 *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights* called upon all three levels of government to adopt interventions to prevent and control obesity.
- A 2016 Standing Senate committee report on obesity in Canada called upon the federal government to consider a levy on sugary drinks.
- A variety of Canadian and international health experts have called for a reduction in sugar consumption and sugary drinks in particular.
- Other jurisdictions have shown that by creating healthy environments and making the healthy choice the easy choice, health outcomes are improved. New York City's plan to increase healthy eating focuses on improving the food environment and includes legislated calorie

labelling, counter-marketing and restrictions on sugary drinks, and the creation of food policies in city facilities. The plan has been successful and has been linked to decreases in childhood obesity, heart disease and diabetes as well as increased life expectancy.

- Policy changes that address sugary drink consumption to improve community health are becoming more common. Many US jurisdictions have introduced levies on sugary drinks, including: Berkeley, San Francisco, Albany and Oakland in California; Boulder, CO; Philadelphia, PA; Navajo Nation; and Cook County, IL. Numerous countries have introduced levies on sugary drinks including Mexico, Belgium, France, Norway, United Kingdom, South Africa, Mauritius, Barbados, Chile, Dominica, Tonga, St Helena, French Polynesia, Samoa, Hungary and Finland.
- San Francisco introduced a law that requires health warnings on advertisements for sugary drinks in 2016. Davis and Stockton, CA have mandated water or milk as the default beverage option for kids' meals. Hawaii has mandated that beverages other than water shall not be sold during meal serving period in schools. France introduced legislation which disallows free refills of sugary drinks in food service outlets. Colombia has mandated the removal of all soft drinks from elementary schools.
- In Mexico, results show that the 1 peso per ounce (approximately 10%) tax on sugary drinks was associated with as high as a 12% decrease in the purchase of taxed beverages among the general population, and as high as a 17% decrease among low income households.

## Recommendations

Heart & Stroke recommends that:

### Federal Government

1. Restrict commercial food and beverage marketing to children and youth.
2. Implement a manufacturer's levy on sugary drinks. This should be an excise tax (collected from the manufacturer, not the consumer), based on volume and increasing in rate according to the amount of free sugars per unit in the beverage. The revenue should be used to fund health living initiatives, including improving access to safe drinking water in Indigenous communities.



3. Educate Canadians about the risks associated with sugary drink consumption through public awareness and education campaigns.
4. Mandate warning labels on sugary drinks and/or sugary drink advertisements.
5. Ensure nutritional information of all foods and beverages sold in food service outlets and restaurants are readily available to consumers at the point of purchase (i.e. on overhead menu boards and table menus).

## Provincial Governments

1. Restrict commercial food and beverage marketing to children.
2. Adopt a levy on a full spectrum of sugary drinks.
3. Create and support healthy food policies that limit availability of sugary drinks in public places, such as schools, recreation centres, hospitals, and government buildings.
4. Limit portion sizes of sugar-loaded beverage containers at food service locations to a maximum of 16 ounces (500 mL).
5. Mandate warning labels on sugary drinks and/or sugary drink advertisements.
6. Prohibit the advertising of sugary drinks on government-owned properties.
7. Disallow free sugary fountain drink refills in food service outlets.
8. Mandate that restaurants offer water or milk as the default beverage choice for kids' meals, instead of sugary drinks.
9. Educate residents about the risks associated with sugary drink consumption through public awareness and education campaigns.
10. Ensure nutritional information of all foods and beverages sold in food service outlets and restaurants are readily available to consumers at the point of purchase (i.e. on overhead menu boards and table menus).

## Municipal Governments

1. Eliminate sugary drinks in recreation facilities and in schools (through school boards).
2. Limit portion sizes of sugar-loaded beverage containers at food service locations to a maximum of 16 ounces (500 mL).

3. Restrict all food and beverage marketing to children on city property (i.e. child care settings, daycare facilities, schools, public libraries, public transit, parks).
4. Mandate that restaurants offer water or milk as the default beverage choice for kids' meals instead of sugary drinks.
5. Disallow free sugary fountain drink refills in food service outlets.
6. Educate residents about the risks associated with sugary drink consumption through public awareness and education campaigns.
7. Improve access to free potable water through the funding of drinking water stations in public spaces.

## Institutions, food establishments and corporations

1. Limit sales of sugary drinks in the organization's facilities.
2. Charge more for the sale of sugary drinks.
3. Ensure potable drinking water stations (in fountains and/or coolers) are accessible to employees and patrons.
4. Offer water or milk as the default beverage choice for kids' meals instead of sugary drinks.
5. Avoid partnerships with producers and suppliers of foods and beverages high in free sugars.

## What are the benefits?

- A healthier population with reduced risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and other chronic diseases. Improved quality of life.
- Reduced health care costs, improved academic performance and increased workplace productivity.
- Opportunity for governments and organizations to take a leadership role at protecting the health of Canadians.

Life. We don't want you to miss it. That's why Heart & Stroke leads the fight against heart disease and stroke. We must generate the next medical breakthroughs, so Canadians don't miss out on precious moments. Together, we are working to prevent disease, save lives and promote recovery through research, health promotion and public policy.

