

Sugar Sweetened Beverages Position Statement

Position: Diabetes HELP Tauranga (DHT) is committed to improving and protecting the health of the communities in the Western Bay of Plenty. Sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs), are drinks that contain 'added' sugar i.e. soft drinks, fizzy drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, fruit drinks, powdered drinks, cordials, flavoured milks, flavoured waters, and iced teas/coffees. Natural fruit juice, even without added sugar, may have a sugar content similar to SSBs.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines indicate that, ideally, adults should consume less than about 6 teaspoons of sugar per day, and children including those with type one diabetes, less than 3-4 teaspoons of sugar per day. A 350ml of fizzy drink contains up to 9 teaspoons.

Background: Up to 20% of New Zealanders consume SSBs at least 3 times a week, with consumption highest among Maori and Pacific populations, adolescents and young adults. Nearly 1:3 children and 2:3 adults in New Zealand are obese or overweight and regular SSB consumption further increases the risk of becoming overweight or obese. Children who consume one SSB or more per day are 50% - 60% more likely to be overweight or obese compared with children who consume little or none.

SSBs not only contain high quantities of sugar (and so are high in calories) but they typically provide few beneficial nutrients. People drinking SSBs do not feel as full compared to when consuming the same number of calories from food, and studies show that people drinking SSBs do not eat less food to compensate for the high calorie intake from SSBs. Consequently, drinking SSBs can easily result in consuming calories in excess of what is necessary.

Being overweight or obese can contribute to the risk of developing type 2 diabetes (T2), high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Just 1 or 2 SSBs per day may increase the risk of T2 diabetes by 26%. There is a strong association between the amount and frequency of sugar consumed and tooth decay in all children, which remains the most common, long-term preventable disease in New Zealand.

Diabetes HELP Tauranga supports the following measures that reduce the promotion, availability and consumption of sugar sweetened beverages, and that inform the public of the health risks associated with SSB consumption, in particular type two diabetes:

1. Water & plain milk as the preferred drinks for children/youth at DHT managed events
2. Plain tea/coffee/water (with low fat milk) as the preferred beverage at DHT managed events
3. Adoption of the Ministry of Health Guidelines on Nutrition but revision of its healthy eating guidelines to reduce consumption of foods with naturally high sugar content (e.g. certain fruits and fruit juices)
4. Promotion of compulsory SSB product labelling that informs consumers of the known health risks associated with regular SSB consumption; Clear unambiguous, pack labelling which gives total sugar content, including all types of sugar, including those with alternative names
5. Restriction on SSB marketing, sponsorship and promotion to children, and in and around schools, plus availability in supermarkets and stores
6. Government incentives (including taxes) to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and high sugar foods
7. Public health campaigns to educate people about the health risks associated with excess sugar intake
8. Rules introduced around sponsorship of sporting events by manufacturers of sugar-sweetened beverages or high sugar foods
9. Ban on selling sugar-sweetened beverages and high sugar foods in canteens and vending machines in schools, and policies to restrict access in workplaces
10. An obligation to make clean drinking water freely available in all schools, places of employment and in public open spaces.

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