We need a sugar tax NOW!

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What we are **not** debating

We eat and drink too much sugar...
What we are **not** debating

...it’s bad for our health...

...effective strategies to reduce consumption are needed
How a sugar tax is **supposed to** work:

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Tax → Higher price

Fewer calories ← Fewer sales

Less obesity → Better health
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Sugar Taxes: a briefing. Institute of Economic Analysis 2016
Effect on Prices: evidence to date

- 100% of tax passed on to consumers
- Prices often increase *more* than the tax
- Increased price can be offset or avoided by
  - Switching to cheaper brands
  - In-store promotions
  - Crossing borders
  - Aggressive marketing
Effect on sales/purchases

- Demand for high sugar foods/drinks is inelastic

Mexico 10% SSB* tax
- First year: 6% fall in sales

UK 20% SSB tax
- Projected 16% fall in sales

- Causality unproven

- Only short term effects observed

*sugar sweetened beverage

2. Briggs et al BMJ 2013; 347;f6189 doi
Effect on calorie intake

- Mexico 10% SSB tax: first year
  - 16-29y: -13kcal/d
  - Overall: -4 kcal/d
  - -9kcal/d

- UK 20% SSB tax: projected
  - 16-29y: -13kcal/d
  - Overall: -4 kcal/d
Effect on weight

How calories translate into weight change:

- **100 kcal/day**
  \[
  \times 365 \\
  = 36,500 \text{ kcal per year}
  \]
- **3500 kcal = 1 lb fat (0.5 kg)**
- **= 10.4 lb (5 kg) per year**
Effect on weight

- **Mexico:** based on year 1 purchasing data
  - - 2.1 lb (- 0.96kg) per year
- **UK:** projected
  - - 0.9lb (- 0.4 kg) per year
- **Australia projections**
  - - 0.5 kg/year (modest consumers)
  - Up to -2.1kg/year (high consumers)

Flowchart:
- Tax → Higher price
- Fewer calories → Fewer sales
- Less obesity → Better health
Effect on weight: limiting factors

- No effect on non-consumers
- Majority of effect will be complete by 2 years
- High consumers may be less responsive to price changes
- Likely substitution with other (non-taxed) calorie containing drinks
What will we drink instead?

- **Water**: +2
- **Orange juice**: +3
- **Milk (semi-skimmed)**: +4
- **Up to 200 kcal/cup (tall latte, 2 sugars)**: +4

**Change in consumption (%)**

- **Diet soda**: -16
- **Regular soda**: +8

Briggs et al BMJ2013;347:f6189doi
Effect on obesity (projected, UK)

- Obesity -1.3%
- Overweight -0.9%

Briggs et al BMJ2013;347;f6189doi
Limited impact on obesity? Experts agree

• Public Health England comprehensive review of the evidence for sugar reduction

• Concluded and emphasised that other strategies are likely to be more effective than a sugar tax for reducing sugar consumption:
  
  • Stricter regulations on marketing of high sugar foods
  • Reduce price promotions on high sugar foods and drinks
  • Product reformulation

Limited impact on obesity? 
Experts agree

Sugar ‘obsession’ could skew obesity strategy

“I am nervous that the focus on one particular nutrient might drive the agenda rather than evidence”

“It will probably have a negligible impact, but it will tick the box of all those who have been fighting for it for so long. Then we can crack on with the job at hand

Limited impact on obesity?
Experts agree

Ashley Adamson, Professor of Public Health Nutrition at Newcastle University says the sugar tax is "one piece in the jigsaw - it's not going to be the solution" to tackling childhood obesity.
Obesity is due to calorie excess – not just excess sugar

“Sugar is not the sole contributor to excess calories and increasing BMI, and in formulating a childhood obesity strategy the Government will need to adopt a broader approach... and should consider calorie intake as a whole.”

Adverse consequences of targeting single nutrients

- Targeted reduction in saturated fat since the 1970s

- led to an increase in carbohydrate-based snacks and overall carbohydrate intake. Obesity levels soared.

- A tax on high saturated fat foods was ruled out over fears the foods would be substituted with high salt alternatives (Mytton et al, BMJ 2012;344:e2931)
Out of the frying pan...?

- Evidence as yet unclear
- Media coverage affects consumer choices
- Solving one health problem while creating another?
On a positive note...

AG Barr to cut sugar in soft drinks ahead of UK levy

Lucozade launches calorie-free Zero brand in response to sugar agenda

by Ben Bold, 30.03.2016
Summary

- Evidence and experts suggest a sugar tax will have limited impact on
  - Sugar consumption
  - Obesity

- It ignores the wider context of obesity causes

- If we are serious we should start with the higher impact strategies

- And a sugar tax...eventually
The last word

Perhaps we need the **threat** of a sugar tax more than the tax itself!