

Call for policymakers to consider genetic link to soft drink consumption

January 17 2013, by Charis Palmer

Policymakers should understand the urge to drink soft drinks is genetically determined, rather than being solely a lifestyle choice, argue endocrinologists from the Garvin Institute of Medical Research.

A study published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) last year showed a direct correlation between consumption of sugary soft drinks, obesity and [genetic predisposition](#) to weight gain.

Now, Associate Professor Jerry Greenfield has joined other researchers from the Garvan Institute in calling for more attention to be given to the genetic factors behind obesity.

They argue if policymakers better understand the drive to eat is not a factor that people can easily overcome, it might help inform [public health policy](#).

"Policy should reflect the scientific basis of food intake – in other words, people who eat too much and put on weight are not just over consuming because they are greedy, they actually have a very strong drive to eat," Professor Greenfield said.

The call comes as three major Australian health organisations have stepped up efforts to tackle the consumption of [sugary drinks](#) with the launch of a television campaign.

"Sugary drinks shouldn't be part of a daily diet... yet they're being

consumed at levels that can lead to serious health issues for the population," said Craig Sinclair, chair of the Public Health Committee at Cancer Council Australia.

The Cancer Council, together with Diabetes Australia and the National Heart Foundation, are calling on the Federal Government to implement restrictions on the marketing of sugary drinks to children, and also want Treasury to investigate a tax on sugary drinks.

A 2007 survey found almost half of children aged 2 to 16 consumed sugary drinks daily.

There is some evidence, however, that a growing number of Australians are cutting back on sugar consumption.

A survey of 1,511 Australians conducted late last year by Goulburn Valley found 72% were aware of the "sugar is bad for you" debate, and half those surveyed with young families (mainly preschool aged children) agreed you should limit your fruit consumption to cut down on sugar intake.

The official Australian Guide to Healthy Eating recommends adults consume between two and five serves of fruit a day, depending on age and gender.

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