

Opinion: Coca Cola obfuscating impact of dietary and caloric impact on obesity

August 11 2015, by Travis Saunders, Phd, Msc, Cep

Earlier this week friend and fellow science-blogger Matt Herod sent me a link to a [New York Times article](#) outlining a Coca Cola-funded group called the Global Energy Balance Network (GEBN). It's a good article, so head over to read it in full. But the gist of it is summed up by the following quote:

Marion Nestle, the author of the book "Soda Politics" and a professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University, was especially blunt: "The Global Energy Balance Network is nothing but a front group for Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola's agenda here is very clear: Get these researchers to confuse the science and deflect attention from dietary intake."

The Times investigation was kicked off by friend and colleague Yoni Freedhoff:

The [GEBN] website also omitted mention of Coke's backing until Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, an obesity expert at the University of Ottawa, wrote to the organization to inquire about its funding. Dr. Blair [GEBN vice president] said this was an oversight that had been quickly corrected.

Dr Steve Blair is the [vice president](#) of GEBN (full disclosure: I was co-author on a paper with Dr Blair during my MSc, and have posted a video of one of his talks [here](#)), and the article quotes him as saying the following (emphasis mine):

"Most of the focus in the popular media and in the scientific press is, 'Oh they're eating too much, eating too much, eating too much'—blaming fast food, blaming sugary drinks and so on," the group's vice president, Steven N. Blair, an exercise scientist, says in a [recent video](#) announcing the new organization. "And there's really virtually no compelling evidence that that, in fact, is the cause."

GEBN has also posted position papers on their website, including [this one](#) titled What is Causing the Worldwide Rise in Body Weight? The below text is the conclusion from the abstract of that paper (emphasis mine).

Reducing caloric intake in whole populations is challenging especially at relatively low levels of energy expenditure, and evidence suggests that there is a critical energy flux threshold for regulating intake to achieve energy balance. Increasing PA, however, may be more achievable than reducing intake. Activity raises caloric expenditure and can offset excess intake. The implementation of programs to achieve greater PA is therefore vital if the worldwide rise in body weight is to be halted, while we also need to implement programs to help people eat smarter.

I was surprised to read the above statements, because I have taken very different conclusions from the published literature. In the past I have summarized my own views on the causes of the obesity epidemic, which I will be reposting here tomorrow. Later this week, I will also be sharing my thoughts on the relationship between Big Food and Public Health research. In the meantime, head back over to the [Times](#) to read their piece in full.

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