

Obesity debate threatens sugary drinks industry

January 20 2016

Soft drink companies see the obesity debate as the biggest threat to their products, according to leading nutrition commentator Professor Marion Nestle.

Professor Nestle from New York University was holidaying in New Zealand recently and was invited to talk on her latest book, 'Soda Politics' at the University of Auckland's School of Population Health in Tamaki.

She told an audience that included academics, researchers, industry representatives and the public, that the trend in America shows a reduction in consumption of fizzy drinks between the 1990s and 2000s.

"This trend is of great concern to the soda industry," she says. "As early as 2007, Coca-Cola executives were already saying that 'The Achilles Heel of the soda industry is the discussion about obesity'."

Obesity is a huge global issue now and the soda industry is concerned this may further reduce demand for some of their products.

"These companies see obesity concerns as the number one threat to their products," says Professor Nestle.

She told the audience that many people do not realise how much [sugar](#) is in fizzy drinks and how much sugar they should consume each day.

She showed that a 335ml can of CocaCola contains about 10 teaspoons of sugar, a 590ml bottle of CocaCola contains about 16.5 teaspoons of sugar, and a one litre bottle of CocaCola contains about 27.5 teaspoons of sugar.

"The amount of sugar in these drinks is staggering and a lot of people do not understand this very well," says Professor Nestle. "Fizzy drinks are like liquid candy and some scientists think that sugars in liquid are far more harmful than in solid form."

One can of soda drink almost provides the maximum recommended intake of sugar per day, but most people drink more than that and have other sugars in their diet, she says.

The new dietary guidelines in the USA for 2015-20 suggest only a maximum of 10 percent of daily calories (average intake 2000 calories) should be from [sugary drinks](#).

The other major issue highlighted by Professor Nestle is industry funding of [scientific research](#). She cited an article published in the Sunday Times in London last weekend (17 January, reprinted online by The Independent).

The article revealed that recent scientific research claiming that [diet drinks](#) could be better than water at helping people lose weight was funded by an industry body which includes Coca-Cola and PepsiCo among its members.

The study was published in the *International Journal of Obesity* in November. Its findings were in contrast to other research from independent investigators associating diet drinks with no weight loss or even weight gain.

Although more than 5,500 papers were reviewed, the comparison of diet drinks with water was based on just three.

Two papers did not find any significant statistical difference in [weight loss](#), and only one paper, funded by the American Beverage Association, found that those drinking diet drinks were more likely to lose weight.

Provided by University of Auckland

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