

Stopping sales of unhealthy soft drinks in sport centers leads to increased sales of healthy drinks

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New research presented at this year's European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Porto, Portugal (17-20 May) shows that stopping sales of unhealthy soft drinks in sports centres can lead to increases in sales of healthier drinks and the same level of overall sales. The study is by Professor Anna Peeters, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia and former President of the Australia and New Zealand Obesity Society; and Ms Tara Boelsen-Robinson, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia, and colleagues.

Food retail within sports, aquatic and recreation centres is often nutritionally poor, with high sales of confectionary and sugar-sweetened soft drinks. As health-promoting settings they represent an opportunity to implement healthy food retail strategies. YMCA Victoria, the Australian state of Victoria's largest aquatic and recreation provider, recently committed to removing all full sugar soft drink from all its centres, except full sugar sports drinks. This study aimed to determine the impact of the removal of soft drinks from a sample of these recreation and aquatic centres in Melbourne on sales of unhealthy drinks and of all drinks.

Monthly sales data from January 2013 to May 2016 was collected from nine YMCA centres with a kiosk or cafe. All centres had removed full sugar soft drinks by December 2015. Drinks were classified using state government nutritional guidelines as 'green' (best choice - water,

sparkling water with/without sugar free flavour, small reduced fat milk, small reduced fat chocolate milk, tea or coffee with skimmed milk), 'amber' (choose carefully-diet soft drinks or diet sport drinks, fruit juices of 99% fruit juice in servings of 250ml or less) or 'red' (full sugar [soft drinks](#) or sport drinks, fruit juices of more than 250ml). A statistical analysis was conducted to determine the effect of the policy, adjusting for various factors including seasonal effects. Analysis was conducted on changes to the volume of ready-to-drink beverages, as well as dollar sales value of all drinks.

The researchers found that sales volume (ml) of the 'red' ready-to-drink beverages significantly decreased by 55% and sales of 'green' category (healthy) drink volume increased by 24%, with no overall change in 'amber' drinks; in terms of numbers of drinks sold green drinks rose by 13% and red decreased by 38%. The dollar value of all beverages sold did not change after the intervention compared to the pre-intervention period (this was because more green drinks were sold to start with so a small % increase in initially large green sales made up for a larger % fall in the initially smaller red sales).

Professor Peeters concludes: "This innovative policy had its intended effect of reducing purchase of unhealthy drinks, without negatively impacting on overall drinks sales. The development of healthy yet business-friendly outcome measures is important to support the large-scale expansion of such policies."

"The YMCA is committed to promoting health yet the food and drinks we were selling in our centres contradicted this," adds Ariana Kurzeme, Manager for Advocacy, YMCA Victoria. "We decided to remove unhealthy items including [sugary drinks](#) despite the unknown financial impact. Fortunately our policy has been positively received and our customers are choosing healthier options. We are focussing on removing sugar-containing sports drinks next."

The authors say the next steps in their research will be to include further YMCA centres, and also work with YMCA on studies to reduce the amount of confectionary available (such as chocolate bars), as well as replacing all full-sugar sports drinks with the diet sugar-free alternatives over the next year.

Provided by European Association for the Study of Obesity

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