

# Brits consume more sugar than thought

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Credit: University of Reading

Eating more sugar is linked to obesity, the first study using objective measures of sugar intake has found.

The new paper published in *PLOS ONE* investigated tell-tale signs of [sugar](#) intake found in urine and found a significant association between high sugar diets and measures of obesity.

Notably, the paper is the first to investigate a representative sample of the English population only using objective measures of intake and did not rely on information given by study participants. Those results showed that current methods of measuring sugar consumption are particularly inaccurate.

Calculating sugar intake using 'biomarkers' in urine, the researchers found sugar intake to be up to 50% higher than in similar studies using diet questionnaires. The researchers note that previous studies show that [obese people](#) often underestimate – or underreport – their sugar intake.

Dr Gunter Kuhnle, a nutritional epidemiologist at the University of Reading said:

"This paper shows that the link between sugar consumption and obesity is very strong, and that it is not just because people who eat more also eat more sugar.

"We know from other studies that urinary biomarkers are an accurate way of measuring sugar intake. What we have concluded from this national study is that self-reporting of sugar consumption is unreliable so sugar intake can be measured reliably only with biomarkers.

Interestingly, we did not find the same differences for [protein intake](#): the results from our study are similar to those from other national surveys using self-reporting. This means people either know or are happy to say how much protein they eat. Conversely, we calculated that people were consuming considerably higher levels of sugar than they were reporting.

"Because of the difficulties of measuring sugar intake, many studies that rely on self-reporting have actually found that high sugar intake is linked with lower obesity risk. Our studies show clearly that obese people tend to consume more sugar; this is not only because they consume overall more food, but they also consume a higher proportion of that food as sugar."

Using data from participants from the 2005 Health Survey for England (HSE 2005), the study involved a nationally-representative sample of the general population aged 19 to 64 years living in England. Overall, 498 survey participants (200 men, 298 women), aged 19 and over, who

provided a 24-hour urine sample were identified and included in the study.

Dr Panagiota Mitrou, Director of Research Funding at World Cancer Research Fund, said:

"The new, more accurate way of measuring [sugar intake](#) in this study shows that many people are consuming more sugar than they realise. It also highlights the detrimental effect too much sugar can have on a person's [obesity risk](#).

"Obesity is a huge global burden as it increases the risk of many diseases, including 11 common cancers. The study emphasises the urgent need to prioritise reducing [sugar consumption](#) if we are to tackle [obesity](#)."

**More information:** Rachel Campbell et al. Association between urinary biomarkers of total sugars intake and measures of obesity in a cross-sectional study, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0179508](#)

Provided by University of Reading

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