

# Study calls for sugar tax

November 8 2018

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

People who drink sugary beverages are more likely to eat fast food and confectionery and less likely to make healthy dietary choices, University of Otago research has found.

Dr. Kirsten Robertson, of the New Zealand university's Department of Marketing, says consumption of [sugar](#) sweetened beverages (SSBs) is a significant problem in New Zealand.

The drinks have little nutritional benefit and are a leading cause of obesity, tooth decay, and type 2 diabetes.

New Zealand has an obesity epidemic, is the third most overweight nation in the OECD, and 17 per cent of adults' total sugar intake comes from SSBs.

"While a number of other countries have successfully implemented national taxes on SSBs, New Zealand relies on [industry](#) self-regulation and has called for better labelling so individuals can take responsibility for their own sugar intake," Dr. Robertson says.

However, the study, published in international journal *PeerJ*, found people who drank SSBs were less likely to try to eat healthily, and less likely than non-SSB consumers to read [food labels](#).

The researchers surveyed more than 2000 people, measuring their [food](#) and beverage intake over a 24-hour period and self-reported their intentions to eat healthily.

Of those, 30.5 per cent had consumed SSBs in the past 24 hours. They also displayed a general pattern of unhealthy eating as they also consumed dessert, confectionery, [fast food](#) and pre-prepared food, and were less likely to eat breakfast or a meal made from scratch.

"The findings raise significant concerns regarding the effectiveness of the current soft intervention measures. The fact that SSB consumers are less likely than non-SSB consumers to try to eat healthily, or to read food labels, raises serious questions about the likelihood of them changing their behaviour in response to better labelling," Dr. Robertson says.

Along with many other researchers, she believes the food and advertising industries have created an obesogenic environment where consumption choices require significant cognitive effort.

"Past research shows the sugar content in SSBs in New Zealand exceeds WHO recommendations, thus industry self-regulation is not working.

"Further, national taxes have been shown to have little effect on industry sales—with the UK soft drink industry simply reformulating their products to reduce the sugar content.

"Given SSB consumers are less likely than non-SSB consumers to read food labels, national taxes will give some power back to individuals to be able to make healthier choices without having to refer to food labels," she says.

The New Zealand Government could learn from the many other countries that have implemented national taxes on SSBs, including Fiji, Spain, Mexico, France, Tonga, and Belgium.

"Findings in other countries suggest national taxes will encourage the industry to reformulate their products by reducing the [sugar content](#) and will encourage [consumers](#) to select other alternatives. Therefore, we support the sugar tax recommendation by the New Zealand Medical Association and the New Zealand beverage guidance panel.

"At the end of the day, SSBs have little nutritional benefit and are

causing our country significant harm."

**More information:** Kirsten Robertson et al, Supporting a sugar tax in New Zealand: Sugar sweetened beverage ('fizzy drink') consumption as a normal behaviour within the obesogenic environment, *PeerJ* (2018).

[DOI: 10.7717/peerj.5821](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.5821)

Provided by University of Otago

Citation: Study calls for sugar tax (2018, November 8) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-sugar-tax.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.