



Office for Health  
Improvement  
& Disparities

# **Sugar reduction in the UK**

**Reformulation of Food Products in Preventive Health**

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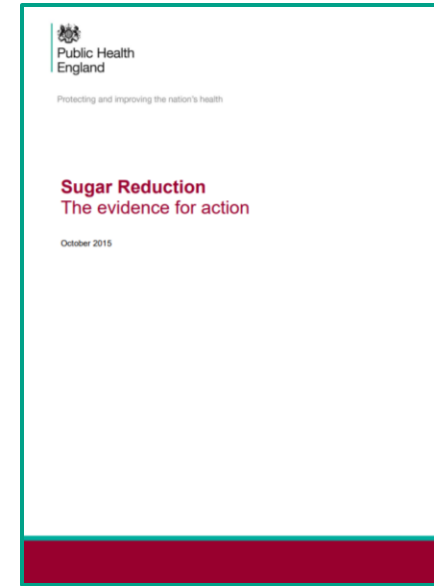
**Dietary Improvement, Reformulation and Nutrient Profiling team**

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# Sugar Reduction Programme

In **October 2015**, PHE published *Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action*:

- Includes evidence that informed the government's thinking on sugar in the diet, drew conclusions about what drives consumption and considered the need for action
- Recommended steps to address the issue including action to impose a tax or levy of 10-20% on high sugar products eg sugary drinks; to limit price promotions applied to, and the advertising and marketing of, high sugar foods; and setting a definition of what "high sugar" means



- It also recommended the implementation of a structured, and transparently monitored, voluntary sugar reduction programme to lower levels of sugar in foods that contribute significantly to the diet

In **August 2016** the first chapter of the governments' obesity policy documents, *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action*, announced the voluntary sugar reduction which has remained a commitment in all subsequent obesity policy documents



# UK voluntary Sugar Reduction Programme and Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL)

## Sugar reduction programme

- Challenges all sectors of the food industry (supermarkets, manufacturers and the out of home sector) to reduce sugar in foods that contribute most to children's intakes (up to 18 yrs) by 20% by 2020 (2016)
- Juices and milk based drinks (out of scope of the SDIL) were added to the programme in 2018 and challenged to reduce sugar by 5% and 20%, respectively by mid-2021

## Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL)

- Announced 2016, became law 2018. Aimed at importers/producers of added sugar drinks and applies to drinks that contain at least 5g/100ml total sugar. Two levy rates set depending on sugar level per 100ml



# How sugar reduction guidelines were developed

- For manufacturers / retailers the 2015 baseline levels of sugar in foods were established using data from Kantar Worldpanel and nutrition information provided by businesses
- For the eating out of home sector the 2015 baseline levels of sugar in foods were assessed using data from NPD CREST and nutrition information collected from websites. However, data is limited and therefore PHE put a call out to businesses and trade bodies to provide their nutrition information / volume sales data
- 5% and 20% reductions applied to the sales weighted average (SWA) total sugar (g/100g) figure for each category
- Pragmatic decisions on calorie/portion size guidelines supported by SWA calories per portion for products likely to be consumed by an individual at one time informed by NDNS, sales data and guidance on eating occasions
- Proposals tested through stakeholder engagement

# Engagement drives reformulation in the right direction

Comprehensive Including retailers & manufacturers. OOH outlets & takeaways, delivery platforms, catering companies, trade bodies, academics alongside international stakeholders

**Extensive engagement with industry and NGOs**

Communicating bilaterally and through large group meetings

- At various levels
- Focusing on market leaders and biggest selling products

Leads to recipe improvement, targeting promotional drivers, portion size reduction

**Flexible approach for industry to deliver sugar reduction**

**Open and transparent annual monitoring**

- Built relationships with new businesses not previously been part of the reformulation programme
- Gained knowledge on feasibility and approaches
- NGOs help with transparency of dialogue & holding industry to account



# Feedback from stakeholders

Businesses (retailers, manufacturers, out of home sector/delivery), trade associations, NGOs:

- **Continuous engagement** in different groupings (all retailers, all chocolate businesses etc), types of meetings (groups, 1:1s), and in writing

How we use feedback:

- To better understand the **mechanisms for action** can be applied to different products
- Consider the **pros/cons to alternatives** to the nutrient of concern (e.g., sugar/sweeteners) and the extent of its use and consumer acceptability
- Learn about the **food manufacturing** processes, **food safety/spoilage** considerations
- Recognise different **business's ethos**, approach to and understanding of reformulation
- For the out of home sector – an understanding of **how different businesses and sectors operate**, how dishes are served

The above helps to inform OHID of how easy/hard it is to reformulate, thus manage expectations



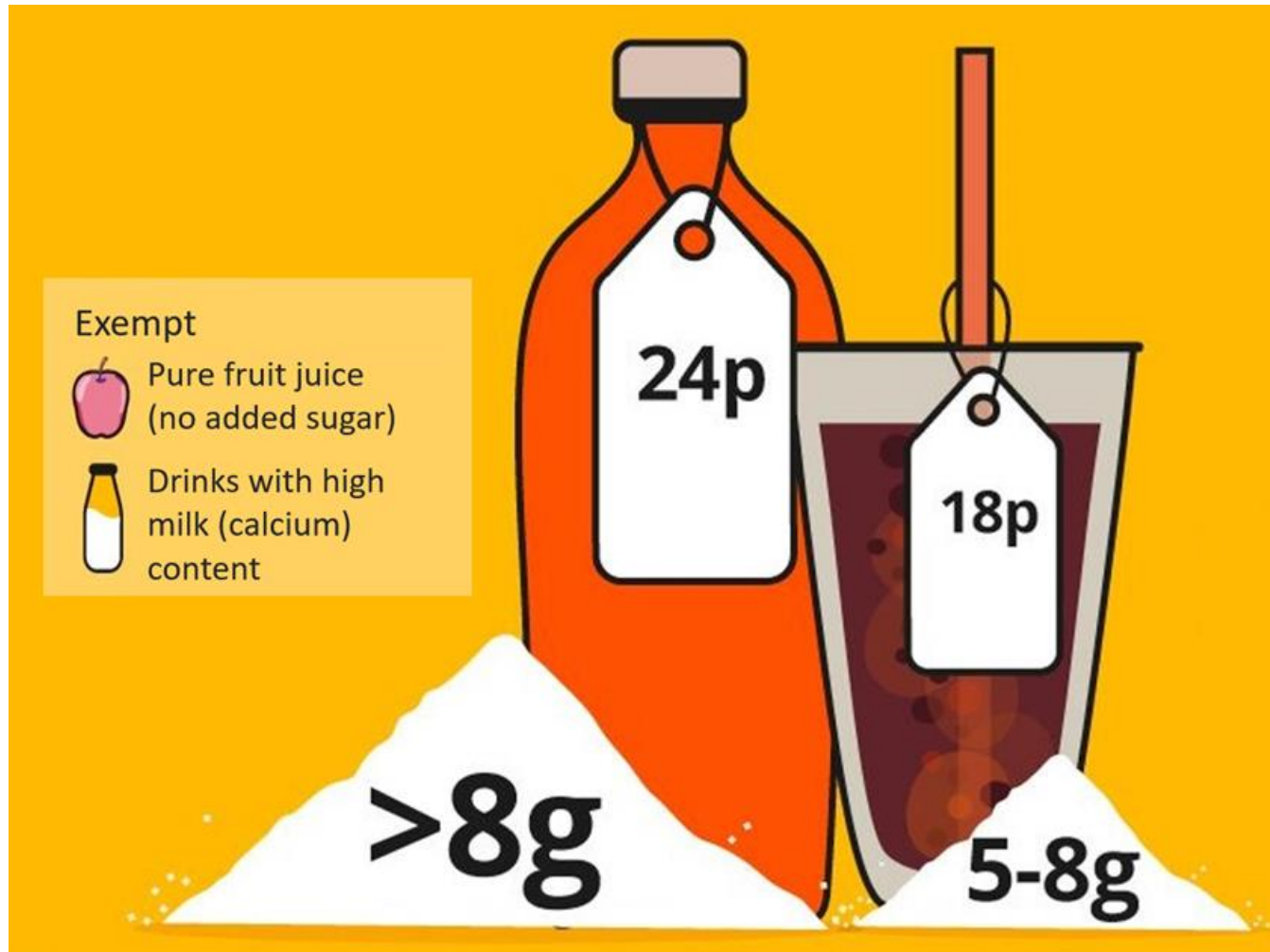
# Publication of guidelines for the food industry

- Guidelines to help businesses work towards the ambition of the programme e.g. 20% sugar reduction
- The voluntary programme gives businesses three methods to reduce sugar in their products:
  1. Product reformulation to lower sugar levels present per 100g/ml
  2. Reduction in portion size of, and/or the number of calories in, products that are likely to be consumed by an individual at one time. This means less sugar as well as calories and/or fat
  3. A shift in consumer purchasing towards lower/no added sugar products
- Provides a baseline to objectively monitor businesses progress





# The Soft Drinks Industry Levy was designed to deliver product reformulation and sugar reduction



## Levy rates

- 18p per litre for drinks with a total sugar content between 5g and up to (but not including) 8g per 100ml
- 24p per litre for drinks with total sugar content equal to or greater than 8g per 100ml
- No tax applied to drinks with sugar content of less than 5g per 100ml

Businesses were expected to reduce sugar levels per 100ml to move between levy rates and reduce the amount of tax they would need to pay through

- recipe reformulation
- reducing portion size
- shifting consumers to lower or no added sugar drinks



# Monitoring of the sugar reduction programme

- Clear government commitment to openly and objectively monitor business's progress in working towards the sugar reduction ambitions
- HMT/HMRC requested that the sales and sugar content of drinks in scope of SDIL were included as part of the monitoring
- To date have published four progress reports on GOV.UK - [Sugar, salt and calorie reduction and reformulation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sugar-salt-and-calorie-reduction-and-reformulation)

# Sugar reduction progress so far

- Fourth progress report of the voluntary sugar reduction programme results 2015 to 2020 (published 2020):
  - This shows reductions in sugar levels across all product categories for the first time
  - Good progress in reducing SWA per 100g achieved in some categories e.g. breakfast cereals (-14.9%) and yogurts and fromage frais (-13.5%).
  - Overall 3.5% reduction in the SWA per 100g for retailers and manufacturers for food categories.
  - The overall figure was reduced by the increased sales of, and substantially lower sugar reduction in, some higher sugar categories (e.g. chocolate and sweet confectionery).
  - Progress more mixed in the eating out of home sector for all products. This sector delivered more in reducing calories per eating occasion.
  - The average sugar content of SDIL drinks decreased by -46% for retailer and manufacturer branded products
  - The second assessment of juice and milk based drinks shows continued reductions in sugar content for retailer and manufacturer milk based drinks and juices have decreased in line with the interim ambition. Little progress achieved in milk based drinks for the eating out of home sector



# Summary of progress 2015-2020

| Product category               | Retailers and manufacturers<br>(% change in SWA*) 2015-2020                       | Eating out of home<br>(% change in SA**) 2017-2020                             |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Overall</b>                 | <b>-3.5</b>   | <b>-0.2</b>  |
| Breakfast cereals              | -14.9   | N/A  |
| Yogurts and fromage frais      | -13.5   | N/A  |
| Ice cream, lollies and sorbets | -7.2  | -0.5   |
| Morning goods                  | -4.9 <sup>^</sup>   | -3.5   |
| Sweet spreads and sauces       | -5.6  | N/A  |
| Cakes                          | -3.2 <sup>^</sup>   | -8.2   |
| Biscuits                       | -3.1  | -0.3   |
| Chocolate confectionary        | -0.9  | N/A  |
| Sweet confectionary            | -2.8  | N/A  |
| Puddings                       | -2.3  | 0.3  |
| <b>Drinks subject to SDIL</b>  | <b>Retailers and manufacturers (% change<br/>total sugar per 100ml) 2015-2019</b> | <b>Eating out of home sector (SA total sugar<br/>content per ml) 2017-2019</b> |
| SDIL                           | -46.  | -44.3  |

\*Sales weighted average is the mean weighted by total sales \*\* Simple average is the simple arithmetic mean

<sup>^</sup> Baseline is 2017 rather than 2015 ++ Data excluded due to incomparability of results



# Progress in juice and milk based drinks

| Juice and milk based drinks – retailers and manufacturer branded products<br>Product category | % Change in SWA Sugar per 100ml (2018-2020) |
|---|---|
| Pre-packed milk based drinks  | -29.7*                                      |
| Coffee and tea powders, syrups and pods as consumed   | -20.3**                                     |
| Pre-packed fermented (yogurt) drinks^   | -7.1*                                       |
| Milkshake powders, syrups and pods as consumed  | -34.2**                                     |
| Pre-packed flavoured milk substitute drinks   | -6.9*                                       |
| Pre-packed blended juices   | -2.8*                                       |
| Pre-packed mono juices  | -1.7**                                      |
| Hot chocolate and malt powders, syrups and pods as consumed                                   | 5.1**                                       |
| Juice and milk based drinks – eating out of home sector<br>Product category                   | % Change in SA Sugar per 100ml (2018-2020)  |
| Open cup hot/cold drinks  | -10.2                                       |
| Blended juices  | -9.4  |
| Open cup milkshakes   | 12.7  |

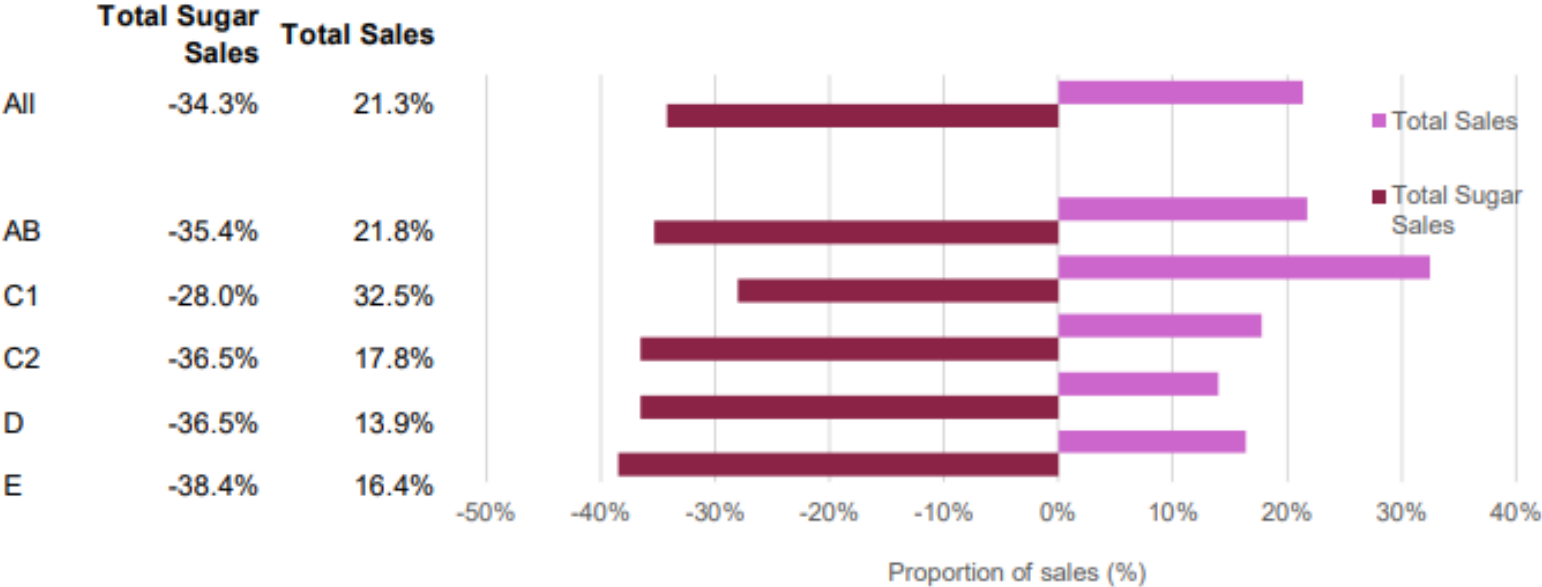
\*Sales weighted average is the mean weighted by total sales \*\* Simple average is the simple arithmetic mean

^ In January 2019 fermented (yogurt) drinks were added to the programme



# Percentage change in the volume and sugar sales of SDIL drinks

- The sugar purchased from retailers and manufacturer branded soft drinks decreased by 34.3% whilst sales have increased by 21.3%. Equivalent figures for the OOH sector are not available.
- The reduction of total sugar sales is largest in the lower social groups C2, D & E Group E
- This analysis has not accounted for other factors that could be causing some of these differences



# Learnings from the reformulation programmes to date

## Programme design

- Having a clear evidence base for action
- A voluntary programme will result in mixed progress within categories eg breakfast cereal
- It will take longer for some food categories to achieve sugar reduction
- The potential for milk based drinks to be considered as part of SDIL provided impetus for action
- A voluntary reduction and reformulation programme alone will not be enough to reduce obesity levels

## Stakeholder learnings

- Managed consultation is an important stage of the programme design and supports stakeholder buy-in
- Important to have stakeholder involvement from the beginning
- NGOs are an important part of the process and can challenge industry in a way that government cannot
- Clear and consistent engagement at working level supports change
- Progress reports hold stakeholders to account and allow scrutiny by others but also create a regular opportunity for dialogue

## Government

- Government can provide a leadership role
- Beneficial that government retains control of decision making in programme design and implementation



# Sweeteners in the UK

- Food Standards Agency (FSA) advises on food safety issues including use of sweeteners
- Sweeteners used in food and drink in the UK have undergone rigorous safety assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Sweeteners that have been approved through EFSA's processes are considered a safe and acceptable alternative to using sugar
- Aware EFSA are re-evaluating scientific evidence on safety
- The FSA and OHID continue to endorse EFSA's scientific opinion on the safety and use of NNS
- UK legislation dictates the amount of sweeteners that can be used and in which products
- Manufacturers must list sweeteners in the ingredients of pre-packaged food and drink, but not their concentration





# Use of sweeteners by the food industry

- Up to businesses whether they wish to use sweeteners or not
- Most of the sugar reduction in drinks in scope of SDIL has been achieved through the use of non nutritive sweeteners
- For categories included in voluntary sugar reduction programme, we know that some businesses use sweeteners to lower the sugar content of food whereas other do not
- Some businesses do not use sweeteners because of the legislation ( e.g. breakfast cereals) or some choose not to use them due to issues of consumer acceptability e.g. major chocolate brands
- There can be variation in sweetener use across categories e.g. yogurts

# WHO recommendation and the evidence base

- Conditional guidance from WHO on non-nutritive (NNS) sweeteners based on evidence of low certainty
- Robust short term RCTs show that NNS can lead to a reduction can help to reduce sugar and energy (calorie) intake and weight.
- Whereas longer term observational studies showed mixed results in terms of NNS intake and impact on adiposity/bodyweight
- Note that long-term observational studies also show an association between NNS intake and increased risk of type 2 diabetes and some other diseases, such as cardiovascular disease (CVD)
- Limitations of observational studies is that results could be due to reverse causality and confounding
- Studies provide associations but cannot say that NNS intake caused these health outcomes
- Many of the studies investigate NNS in beverages, therefore less is known about NNS in food
- Current evidence does not change our view on the use of sweeteners in the UK but aware there are gaps in the evidence base



# Current view

- SACN discussed the issue of NNS at their horizon scanning meeting in June 2022
- In light of the mixed evidence base and the potential increase in intakes as a result of SDIL, SACN agreed to add NNS to their watching brief, to consider the evidence base as it develops and any available information on trends and use of NNS
- The use of sweeteners are not the sole solution to reducing energy intake, as intake of free sugars is just one of several factors that impacts body weight and BMI
- But swapping sugar for NNS, alongside other positive changes to the diet is likely to be beneficial overall
- High sugar intakes increase the risk of tooth decay. Therefore, the use of NNS in food and drink, as long as the product does not contain any sugars, supports lowering the risk of tooth decay