



Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

**\*\*\*STRICT EMBARGO: 09:30hrs Friday 17 July 2015\*\*\***

## Press Release

# Expert nutritionists recommend halving sugar in diet

- **In particular consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages should be minimised**
- **SACN advises more fibre in diet by having more fruit and vegetables and wholegrain foods**
- **Starchy carbohydrates should still form basis of your diet**

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) today advised the government to halve the recommended intake of free sugars to help address the growing obesity and diabetes crises and to reduce the risk of tooth decay.

Free sugars are those added to food (e.g. sucrose (table sugar), glucose) or those naturally present in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices, but exclude lactose in milk and milk products.

Publishing its final *Carbohydrates and Health* report, SACN – an independent body of expert nutritionists – recommended free sugars account for no more than 5% of daily energy intake. This is:

- 19g or 5 sugar cubes for children aged 4 to 6,
- 24g or 6 sugar cubes for children aged 7 to 10,
- 30g or 7 sugar cubes for 11 years and over, based on average population diets.

SACN were asked by the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency to examine the latest evidence on the links between consumption of carbohydrates, sugars, starch and fibre and a range of health outcomes – such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, bowel health and tooth decay – to ensure the government's position on consumption was up to date.

In its review of the evidence, SACN found that:

- High levels of sugar consumption are associated with a greater risk of tooth decay.
- The higher the proportion of sugars in the diet, the greater the risk of high energy intake.
- Drinking high-sugar beverages results in weight gain and increases in BMI in teenagers and children.
- Consuming too many high-sugar beverages increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

In light of these findings, SACN recommends that:

- The average population intake of free sugars should account for no more than 5% daily dietary energy intake.

- The term *free sugars* is adopted, replacing the terms *Non Milk Extrinsic Sugars (NMES)* and *added sugars*.
- The consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g. fizzy drinks, soft drinks and squash) should be minimised by both children and adults.

**Professor Ian Macdonald, chair of the SACN *Carbohydrates and Health* working group,** said:

“The evidence is stark – too much sugar is harmful to health and we all need to cut back. The clear and consistent link between a high-sugar diet and conditions like obesity and type 2 diabetes is the wake-up call we need to rethink our diet.

“Cut down on sugars, increase fibre and we’ll all have a better chance of living longer, healthier lives.”

The SACN report also looked at the amount of carbohydrates and fibre being consumed, and the link to health outcomes and recommended that:

- The current recommendation that starchy carbohydrates, wholegrain where possible, should form 50% of daily calorie intake is maintained
- Those aged 16 and over increase their intake of fibre to 30g a day, 25g for 11- to 15-year-olds, 20g for 5- to 11-year-olds and 15g for 2- to 5-year olds.

SACN’s recommendations have been widely consulted on since publication of the draft report in June 2014. The consultation period resulted in no major changes and the report and recommendations have been passed to the government for consideration.

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#### **Notes to editors:**

1. Definitions of sugar vary. ‘Free sugars’ are those added to foods plus those naturally present in fruit juices, syrups and honey. It does not include the sugars naturally present in intact fruit and vegetables or dairy products.
2. The [SACN report and recommendations](#) and the [SACN consultation from June 2014 and responses](#) have been published on its website.
3. A summary document, *Why 5%*, has been published alongside the report to provide a simple explanation of the rationale and science behind the report. This is published on the [PHE website](#).
4. SACN is a committee of independent experts that advises Government on matters relating to diet, nutrition and health. In 2001, SACN succeeded the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition (COMA). It was asked by the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency to review the literature on dietary carbohydrates and their role in health which was last considered in the 1990s.
5. SACN is chaired by Dr. Ann Prentice, Director of MRC Human Nutrition Research, Cambridge. The SACN Working Group on carbohydrates is chaired by Prof. Ian Macdonald, Professor of Metabolic Physiology at the University of Nottingham and Head of the School of Life Sciences.
6. More information about SACN can be found at [www.sacn.gov.uk](http://www.sacn.gov.uk).
7. Dietary carbohydrates and their role in health were last considered by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy in the early 1990s.
8. SACN recommends that the dietary reference value for total carbohydrate should be maintained at a population average of approximately 50% of dietary energy. Carbohydrates are a good source of energy and SACN recommends that we should continue to base our diets on them. This report concludes that total carbohydrate intakes at the current recommended levels show no association with the incidence of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, glycaemia or colo-rectal cancer.
9. The SACN report shows that in children and adolescents, limited evidence indicates that there is no association between total carbohydrate intake and body mass index or body fatness.

10. SACN is recommending that people should consume carbohydrate rich foods that are rich in fibre. There is strong evidence to indicate that diets high in fibre are associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer. As well as this, evidence shows that having more whole grains is associated with a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer.
11. New evidence considered for this report has led SACN to propose broadening the definition of dietary fibre currently used in the UK. SACN is proposing that adults should consume 30g fibre/day measured according to the new definition. This recommendation is an increase of about 6g/day compared with the current advice. Currently adults are advised to consume 18g dietary fibre/day using the long-standing definition of fibre; this is roughly equivalent to 24g according to the new, broader definition.
12. The proposed new definition of fibre encompasses all carbohydrates that are naturally integrated components of foods and that are neither digested nor absorbed in the small intestine and have a degree of polymerisation of three or more monomeric units, plus lignin.
13. The recommendation of 30g of fibre a day could be achieved, for example by consuming all of the following in a day: five portions of fruit and vegetables, two slices of wholemeal bread, a portion of high fibre breakfast cereal, a baked potato and a portion of whole wheat pasta.
14. The definition of “free sugars” captures the main sources of sugars in the UK diet and is more practical than the terms previously used in dietary surveys (NMES and added sugar). The term free sugars includes sucrose (table sugar), a disaccharide present in foods; glucose and fructose are examples of monosaccharides; they are found in fruit and in honey, for example.
15. The dietary fibre reference values for children are based on the energy dietary reference value for a given age range (SACN, 2011) as a proportion of the adult value. They have been rounded to the nearest multiple of five and are informed by comparative intakes of dietary fibre in different age groups in the NDNS.
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<b>Maximum sugars intake per day</b>			
	<b>Grams</b>	<b>Sugar Cubes<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Teaspoons (<i>4g – 6g in a teaspoon<sup>2</sup></i>)</b>
<b>4 to 6 years</b>	19	5	3 - 5
<b>7 to 10 years</b>	24	6	4 - 6
<b>11 years and above</b>	30	7	5 - 7

**SACN Press Office**

**Tel: 0207 654 8038, Out of hours: 020 8200 4400**

**Email: [sally.brown@phe.gov.uk](mailto:sally.brown@phe.gov.uk)**

<sup>1</sup> The size and weight of sugar cubes varies; a 4g (silver spoon) sugar cube has been used.

<sup>2</sup> Food Portion Sizes, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, HMSO, 1993.