Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Sugar reduction: report on progress between 2015 and 2018

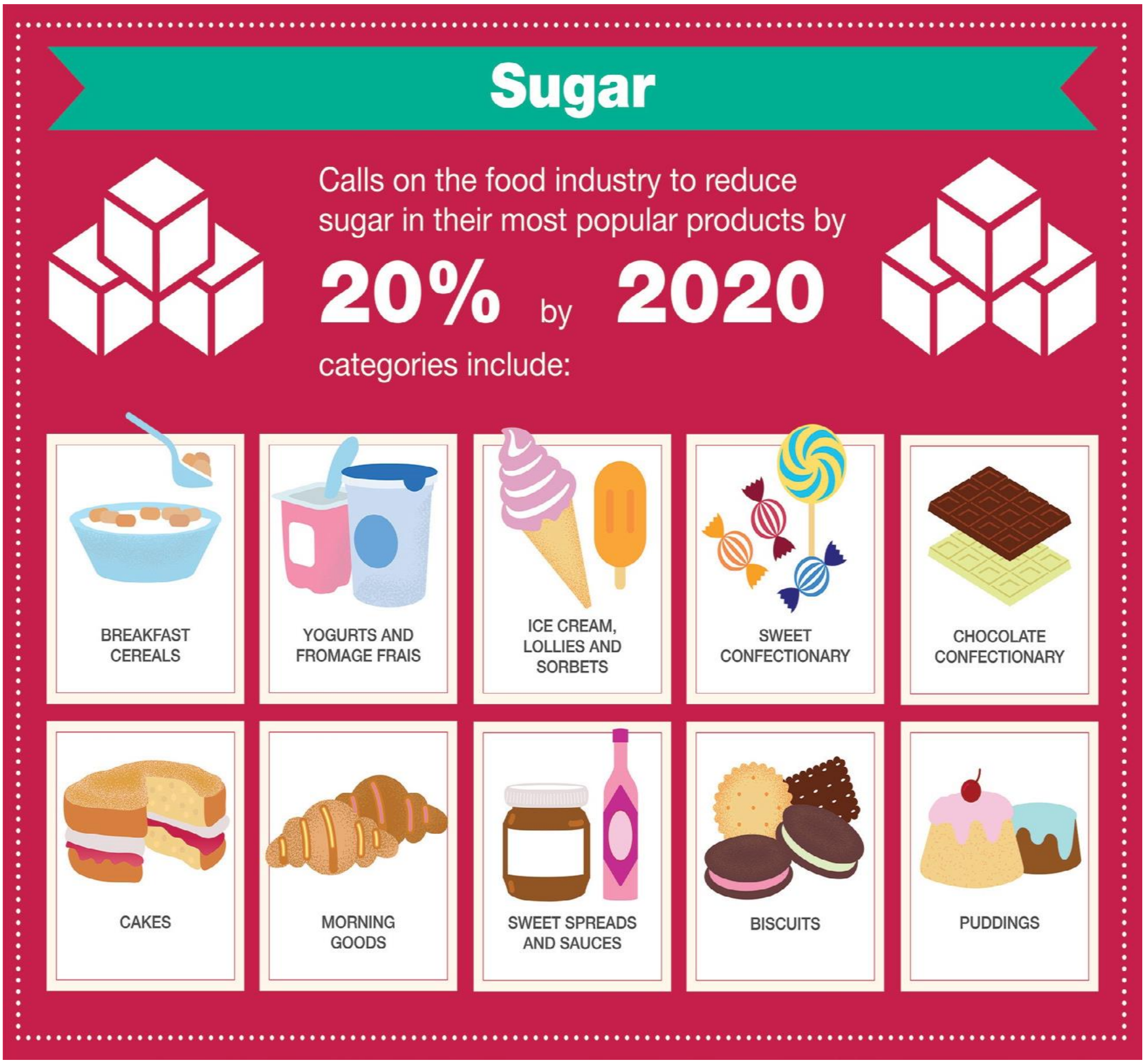
Summary

The sugar reduction programme

As a nation we are on average consuming too much sugar – which can often mean too many calories, leading to weight gain and obesity. Children are consuming more than double their maximum recommended allowance of sugar.

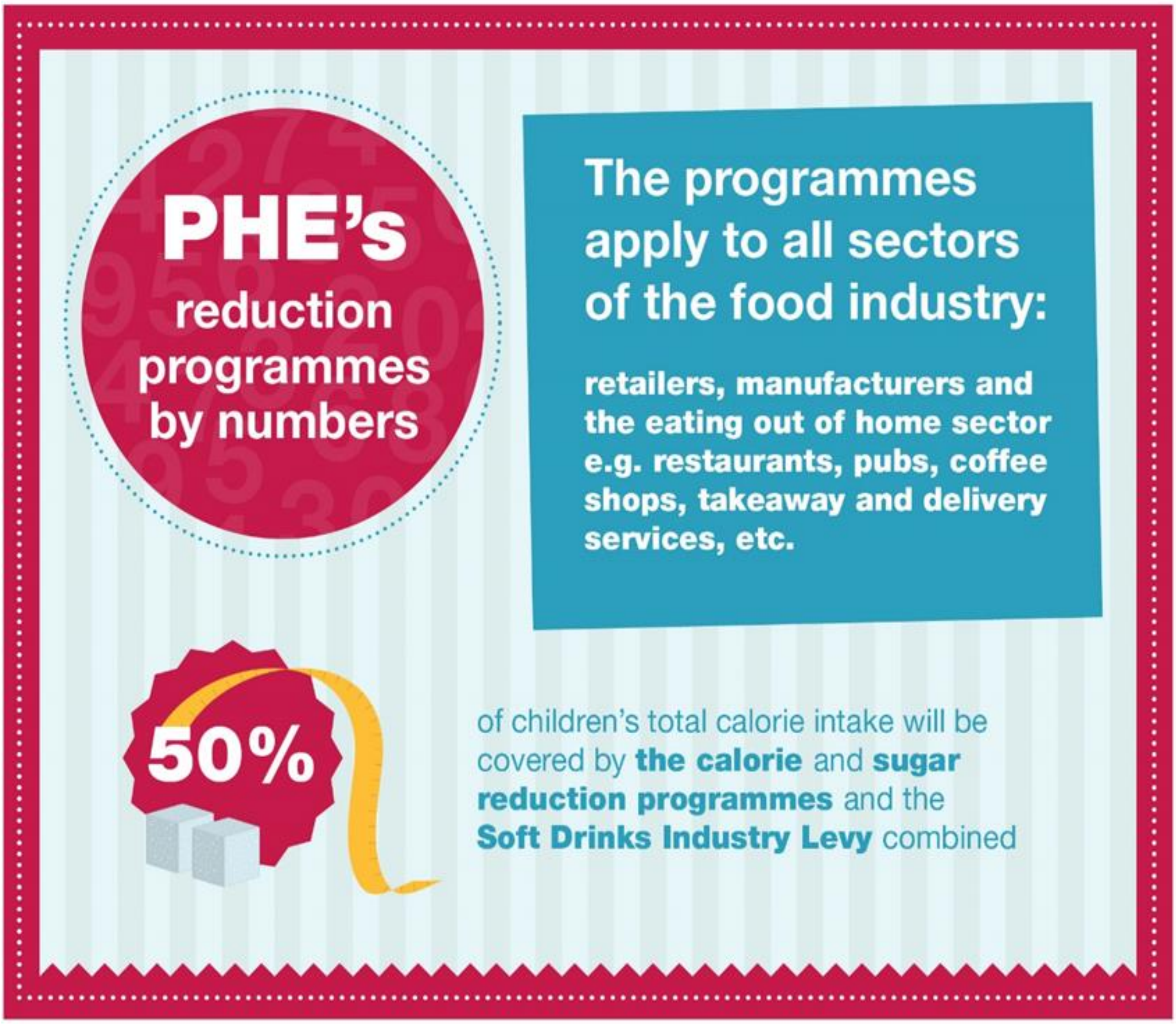
In England, around 1 in 4 children have tooth decay; and 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school.

Obese or overweight children are more likely to become obese or overweight adults than healthy weight children, increasing their risk of cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes and some cancers. There are also mental health issues associated with being overweight or obese as a child or an adult.



The sugar reduction programme has challenged the food industry to reduce 20% of sugar from the food categories contributing the most to children's diets, by 2020. The reductions in sugar should also be accompanied by reductions in calories where possible.

Businesses are likely to be adopting one or more of the three options for taking action: lowering the amount of sugar per 100g in their products, reducing portion size, and/or moving consumers towards lower/no added sugar products.



The first year

In our year one update, we reported on progress made by the food industry between 2016-17, from a 2015 baseline.

For the 8 food categories where measuring progress was possible, there was a 2% reduction in both sugar and calories overall. This was against the first-year ambition of 5% sugar reduction.

We also reported on progress made on sugary drinks covered by the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL). This showed a reduction in sugar by 11% (measured in sales weighted average grams per 100ml).

Why all categories weren't reported on in the year one report

Last year, progress for 8 food categories was reported. For cakes and morning goods, sugar per 100g could not be calculated as too few had their accompanying weights available in both years which is needed to calculate sugar content per 100g.

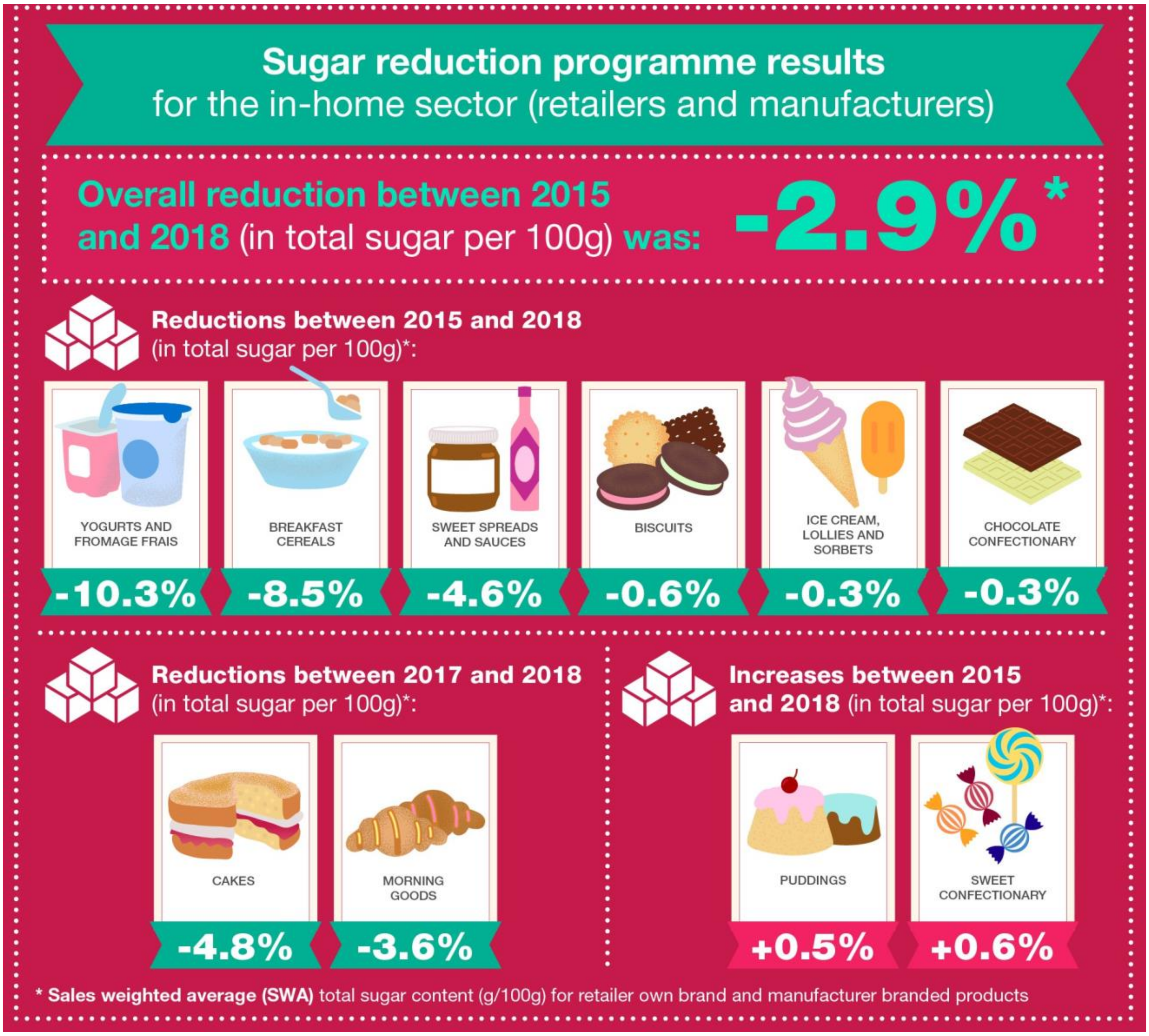
Improvements were made to the data for these categories in the 2017 and 2018 datasets, with data related to a product's weight being collected through fieldwork in retail stores. Progress in these categories can now be reported.

The second report on progress

In the second report on progress towards the 20% ambition, we are assessing industry's progress across all food categories included in the sugar reduction programme between 2015-2018, and progress made under the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL). This includes a comparison for the first time of progress made by the out of home sector, against a baseline year of 2017.

Results

For retailer own brand and manufacturer branded foods there has been an overall 2.9% reduction in sugar since 2015. This is measured using a sales weighted average:



For products purchased from the out of home sector, there has been a 4.9% reduction in average sugar content since 2017. This is calculated using a simple average and is based on more limited data and less comprehensive nutrition information than that for retailers and manufacturers.

The results for retailer own brand and manufacturer branded foods cannot be directly compared with the out of home sector. This is because of the difference in the metrics used - sales weighted average for retailers and manufacturers and simple averages for the out of home sector – and because the baseline is different. Also, there may be bias as nutritional information is not available for some outlets in the out of home sector.

For drinks subject to the SDIL, the average sugar content decreased by 28.8% between 2015 and 2018. This is also measured using a sales weighted average.

The total tonnes of sugar sold in foods included in the reformulation programme from retailer own brand and manufacturer branded foods has increased by 2.6% between 2015 and 2018 (excluding cakes and morning goods)

The sugar sold in soft drinks subject to SDIL has decreased by 21.6%. Equivalent figures for the out of home sector are not available.

Analysis by socioeconomic group using data for retailers and manufacturers shows that the total sugar purchased from these drinks has decreased in all socio-economic groups, although the decrease is smallest in the lowest socio-economic group. However, this analysis has not accounted for other factors that could be causing some of the differences between groups.

Why there is a different baseline for out of home data

The baseline for the out of home sector is 2017 due to a change in data provider.

A comparison over time is included now for the first time and is made for the year ending August 2018.

What this means

For retailers and manufacturers, more progress has been achieved in specific food categories, particularly for breakfast cereals and for yogurts and fromage frais. However, for most of the other food categories sold by retailers and manufacturers, there have been missed opportunities and less progress has been made.

Based on the more limited nutrition information, the out of home sector appear to have made more progress towards the government's ambitions on sugar reduction in comparison to the retailers and manufacturers, based on simple average sugar levels.

Dr Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist at PHE:

"The report shows a mixed picture. Encouragingly, some businesses have made good progress in reducing sugar but some businesses and categories have made very little or none.

We know the public wants the food industry to make food healthier. It is clear this can be done, but we urge the whole of the food and drink industry to keep up the momentum to help families make healthier choices."

PHE is committed to transparent monitoring of the sugar reduction programme. The next progress report, due in the first half of 2020, will provide a further assessment of progress by all sectors of industry towards achieving the 20% reduction

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