

sugar high

RHIANE KIRKBY INVESTIGATES THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW 'SUGAR TAX'

It was the surprise announcement in the Chancellor's budget – a sugar tax to be imposed on soft drinks. The aim? To tackle childhood obesity by raising an estimated £520 million a year and spending that – in England, at least – on funding sport in primary schools.

George Osborne's announcement came as a “bolt from the blue” say commentators and even Jamie Oliver, who had been campaigning tirelessly for it for over a year, said he was “especially shocked”.

The sugar tax is aimed at high-sugar drinks,

particularly fizzy drinks, which are popular amongst children. It won't apply to pure fruit juices or milk-based beverages. Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Irn-Bru, which have more than eight grams of sugar per 100ml, are just some of the drinks which will be taxed at the higher rate of around 24p litre, while brands such as Fanta, Sprite and Dr Pepper, which have more than five grams of sugar per 100ml, will pay around 18p. The tax won't, however, come into effect until 2018 to give the drinks industry time to reformulate its recipes. ▶



Fizzy drinks are the single largest source of sugar in the diets of the UK's children and teenagers

WHAT'S THEIR LIMIT?

SOURCE: NHS AND BRITISH DENTAL ASSOCIATION

- **5 sugar cubes per day**
for 4-6 year olds (19g)
- **6 sugar cubes per day**
for 7-10 year olds (24g)

SUGAR CONTENT

SOURCE: ACTION ON SUGAR

- **Coca-Cola/Pepsi**
35g (9 teaspoons)
per 330ml can
- **Appletiser**
34g (8 teaspoons)
per 330ml serving
- **Fanta Orange**
23g (6 teaspoons)
per 330ml can

Stacking up: current
sugar consumption
levels are far exceeding
recommendations



Drinks have been targeted because a typical can contains enough sugar to take someone over their recommended daily intake in one hit. They're regarded as 'empty calories' as they have no nutritional benefit, and companies are seen to target their high-calorie products at the young, with fizzy drinks being the single largest source of sugar in the diets of the UK's children and teenagers.

Not surprisingly, the tax has been welcomed by health campaigners, but it's interesting to find that young people are also very much in support of it. *First News*, the weekly newspaper for children, asked children aged seven to 14 whether they thought the tax should be extended to cover all sugary drinks. The paper had a massive response, with 68% being in favour. Georgia, 11, commented, "Anything with lots of sugar in should have a tax on it," while 10-year-old Jeevan said, "I think that tax should be on all sugary drinks as people have too much sugar and this is making them obese, and obese children usually become obese adults."

These comments were countered by others who sided with the drinks industry in thinking that "people should have the right to choose". But amongst all the responses, it was interesting to see just how many times 'obesity' was mentioned.

One in ten children starting primary school in England is obese and by the time they leave, that figure has increased to one in five. Perhaps no surprise then, that it's an issue with which children

are familiar, although new research by University College London found recognition of childhood obesity amongst parents to be low.

It's not just about obesity, though. The other big issue the sugar tax is hoping to tackle is tooth decay. Research by the Royal College of Surgeons in England found that almost a third of five year olds are suffering from tooth decay and it's the most common reason why five to nine year olds are admitted to hospital. Sugar consumption has a big part to play, with current levels far exceeding recommendations. The British Dental Association labelled the tax "progress", but countered that by saying a multi-agency approach was needed to "confront this preventable epidemic." Dentists and health campaigners are hoping this will come in the Prime Minister's Childhood Obesity Strategy, which is due to be published in the coming months. "We need a well-considered, brave and bold strategy of policies, initiatives, incentives and community-based interventions which together with the tax can be a powerful tool for change," urges Jamie Oliver, adding, "David Cameron needs to act like a parent and not a politician."

Sugar tax may be seen as a significant step in the fight against childhood obesity, but for many it's just the start. Campaigners believe there needs to be an assault on the food and drinks industry as a whole. Only time will tell whether the government will be brave enough to do that. **1**

PREVENTING TOOTH DECAY

- Brush teeth and gums twice a day.
- Be sure to use an age-appropriate fluoride toothpaste.
- Reduce the amount of sugar and fizzy drinks consumed.
- Try to visit your dentist twice a year.



TOM'S OF MAINE
JUICY MINT ANTICAVITY
FLUORIDE RINSE
For kids aged six and over.
£5.67, amazon.co.uk



BRUSH DJ
Let them brush their teeth to their favourite songs – this fun app tells them when to start and stop.
Free, brushdj.com



TOBAR BRUSH TIMER
This toothbrush holder also tells you how long to clean for. **£5.79, amazon.co.uk**