

Confronting some fallacies of SA's sugar consumption with scientific facts.

I am writing in response to the article "Sugar leaves a bitter taste" (Cape Times, August 18). While it may be the view of the authors that sugar causes diabetes and obesity and tooth decay, I need to assure you that according to scientific evidence, this is not true.

1. Sugar and Weight: The international authority, the World Health Organisation (WHO), funded a review on

sugar and obesity published last year which concluded that any link to body weight was due to overconsumption of calories and was not specific to sugars.

Weight gain and obesity occur when we eat more calories than our body can use. The excess calories are stored as fat. Rather than eliminate specific foods, it is better to match

the amount of food with the amount of energy consumed from food with the amount of energy expended, which can be increased by physical activity. Singling out sugar does not solve the obesity crisis in South Africa, and it is irresponsible if we encourage the public to think that this is so.

2. Sugar and Diabetes. Eating sugar does not cause diabetes. Genet-

ics and an unhealthy lifestyle such as poor physical activity and obesity contribute to developing diabetes. In fact people who have diabetes are allowed sugar in their diet. Numerous studies have investigated links between sugar and diabetes, with experts from the European Food Safety Authority and Institute of Medicine being very clear that diabetes is not caused by eating sugar.

3. Sugar and Tooth decay: Many people associate sugar with dental caries, however all carbohydrates can contribute to the formation of cavities. Several studies have shown that where proper oral hygiene is practised, caries prevalence has decreased despite increases in sugar consumption.

Furthermore, if carbohydrate-containing foods are eaten frequently but

oral hygiene is maintained and fluoride used, caries are not likely to form.

Therefore, prevention should focus on proper oral hygiene and adequate fluoride use (such as fluoride in tooth-paste), rather than fermentable carbohydrates alone.

4. The WHO did not issue guidance on sugar: The article states that the WHO released guidance on sugar, but this is not true. The WHO released a draft recommendation for the intake of sugar. The strength of evidence used to draw up the draft has been widely questioned and rated as poor.

5. South Africans consume 9.7 percent of their calories from sugar (FAO – 2013) : This is within the 10 percent being recommended by WHO.

6. Credit Suisse is not an authority on health issues : The report quoted in the article provides an unbalanced view of the world's obesity problem and the role sugar plays in the human diet. Its conclusions were based on a very limited selection of scientific work. The report is not a peer reviewed published scientific paper.

As custodians of nutrition information we need to be promoting accurate nutrition information.

Sugar can be enjoyed as part of a balanced diet.

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