

The Removal of Sugar Sweetened Beverages from UCD Campus

The Rationale

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends taxation of SSBs as an effective population intervention to reduce sugar consumption and help address obesity and its effects (World Cancer Research Fund, 2018). Only 40% of adults now have a healthy weight in Ireland (Department of Health, 2016). Adult obesity costs the state €1.13 billion a year (SafeFood, 2012). Obesity is a complex issue with many external factors- the physical environment (e.g. vending machines) contributing to individual factors (e.g. a person's own motivation). According to the World Cancer Research Fund (2018), the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) leads to weight gain and contributes to the rising rates of obesity.

In addition to interventions aimed at individuals, there must be a permanent change to the choice of food and drinks available (Lean, 2018). Evidence has shown that long-lasting behavior change in dietary habits is difficult to achieve and maintain in adults. This is due, in part, to deep rooted habits and food preferences established during childhood. Therefore, we need to change the environment to support people to make healthy changes.

The sugar tax came into effect in Ireland in May 2018, which means that drinks containing 5g or more of sugar per 100ml are taxable and at a higher rate of tax if the drink contains 8g of sugar per 100ml. In order to address obesity and to target behavior at an individual level, there is a recommendation to limit or remove access to high SSBs in public places such as vending machines (WHO, 2014).

Healthy UCD is a health promotion initiative designed to create a sustainable healthy university community and is committed to our aim of being a global health promoting university that ensures the holistic health and well-being of every member of the UCD community. As UCD-Belfield is a stand-alone campus, it is possible to test the effects of physical changes in the retail environment on consumer choices and behaviours. During a seven-week pilot initiative, Healthy UCD decided to remove high SSBs from the Belfield campus with the aim to identify how staff and students react to the removal of all high SSBs.

Our Research:

Healthy UCD, in partnership with the contracted beverage supplier, conducted a seven-week trial (January-March 2018) when all SSBs were removed from the campus and replaced with sugar-free or low-sugar alternatives. On completion of the trial, an anonymous survey of staff and students was conducted across the campus. Participants were approached and asked to complete an e-survey.

Over 500 individuals completed the survey over four days, of which over half were regular purchasers of SSBs in a typical week. The majority of participants were unaware that SSBs were not available since the beginning of the pilot. If their usual SSB increased by 10% in price: over 40% said they would decrease the amount they would buy; 6% would change to beverages with reduced sugar; 20.5% would buy at the same rate; 16.7% would not change their habits; 11% were undecided and the remainder would increase the amount or change to other sources of sugar such as sweets or chocolate. Over 60% of participants had knowledge that a SSB tax would be applied in Ireland.

After the trial, the Healthy UCD committee shared the findings with the University Management Team with a proposal to permanently remove these beverages from sale on campus. With the support of the UCD Students Union and UCD beverage suppliers and retail outlets, an agreement was reached to not reintroduce high SSBs back on campus. Not having high SSBs available for purchase on campus is one of a number of initiatives, including the smoke-free campus initiative, Healthy UCD are continually working on to make the campus a healthier place to live and work. Further information can be found on our website www.ucd.ie/healthyucd with updates on our twitter page @healthyucd also.

FAQ'S:

Q. Why remove high sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs)?

- A pilot study was conducted to gauge staff and student responses to the removal of high SSBs over a seven-week period. The results of this pilot proved positive in that the majority of participants did not have an issue with high SSBs being unavailable on campus. Therefore the beverage suppliers, the catering companies on campus, the Healthy UCD

committee and the University Management Team decided to not reintroduce high SSBs into UCD.

Q. Why can't people choose whether to get a high sugar sweetened drink or not?

- Outside of UCD, people have the option to purchase and bring high SSBs into campus if they so wish. There are many other drink options still available within UCD such as water, low and no sugar fizzy drink alternatives (Pepsi Max, Club Zero, 7up Free), sports drinks, milk, smoothies, juices and protein drinks.

Q. What are the high SSBs that are no longer available?

- The high SSB drinks no longer stocked on campus include Club Orange, Club Lemon, Club Rock Shandy, 7up, Pepsi, Energise Edge and Red Bull full sugar.

Q. I bought a juice drink in UCD and it's very high in sugar. Why are juices, smoothies and protein drinks being sold and full sugar soft drinks not being sold?

- The Government's SSB taxation policy applies to drinks that provide only sugar with no other nutritional value. Drinks such as juices and smoothies have naturally occurring sugars and, therefore, may have a high sugar content but also have additional nutritional benefits which are not in soft drinks. Therefore, drinks such as smoothies, juices and protein drinks are exempt from the sugar tax, as well as our pilot and the subsequent removal of high SSBs.

Q. Are no & low sugar soft drinks better for you than full sugar ones if they've got sweeteners in them?

- Some people prefer sugar, some prefer alternatives to sugar- sweeteners are simply a way of providing a sweet taste without the calorific impact of full sugar. The suppliers we work with only use sweeteners that have been fully tested and approved at a European level and are reputedly sourced (World Cancer Research Fund, 2018).

Q. What about people who suffer from Phenylketonuria (PKU) or who have allergies to sweeteners?

- Phenylketonuria (PKU) is a rare condition (1 in 4,500 babies in Ireland are diagnosed with PKU) in which the body cannot break down the protein phenylalanine (HSE, 2017). People who have PKU are advised to have a low protein diet and avoid aspartame which can be found in some diet versions of fizzy drinks. Drinks containing aspartame are clearly labeled and there are other drink choices available in UCD such as still and sparkling water and hot beverages such as tea and coffee. These drink choices are also available to those who have allergies or cannot consume sweeteners.

Q. As high SSB's are no longer available in UCD what about people with diabetes who need to manage low blood glucose?

- People with diabetes are advised to eat a healthy diet that is low in refined sugar; this which means limiting the amount of high sugar foods they consume. Drinking low or no sugar drink alternatives is recommended for people with diabetes so that their blood glucose (the sugar found in blood) remains steady as spikes or sudden rises in blood glucose can cause poor health in people with diabetes. Some people with diabetes, especially if they are taking insulin or certain medications to control their blood glucose, can experience low blood glucose (hypoglycemia), particularly if they miss a meal or have extra activity. Hypoglycaemia should be treated by taking a sugary food or drink as quickly as possible (Diabetes Ireland, 2017). As high SSBs are no longer available on UCD campus, people with diabetes should carry glucose tablets which can be found in UCD Procure Pharmacy. Fruit juices can also be used as an alternative to treat hypoglycemia. (Clare Corish, RD)

Q. What about athletes who use sugar for training? e.g. glucose sports drinks

- Athletes require a significant amount of energy (calories) and fluids when training frequently (Sport Ireland Institute, 2018). The 3 Rs are key to healthy training- Refuel, Rehydrate and Repair. Milk is an ideal drink to meet the 3 Rs as it contains carbohydrates to refuel, protein to repair and water to rehydrate. Skimmed milk has been shown to hydrate the body as effectively as a sports drink. It also contains valuable nutrients that contribute to good health. Milk is cheap, easy to obtain and makes a great recovery drink after

exercise/sport (National Dairy Council, 2017). There are 6 teaspoons of sugar in a 500 ml sports drink and are not recommended unless a training session lasts longer than 1 hour (Wood-Martin, 2018). Overuse of sports drinks can contribute to weight gain and poor dental health. (Clare Corish RD).

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