2015

Added Sugars: Educating the Public on New Guidelines

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Added Sugars: Educating the Public on New Guidelines

Michael Grant, MSIII

Project Site: Springfield, VT
The Problem with Added Sugars

- Excess added sugars in a person’s diet increases their risk for dyslipidemia and for mortality due to cardiovascular disease.\(^1,^2\)

- Added sugars have higher glycemic indexes than those naturally occurring in foods
  - Diets that consist mainly of lower glycemic index carbohydrates are associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.\(^3\)

- New World Health Organization guidelines published in 2014 recommend that less than 5% of daily calories should come from added sugars (less than about 25 grams for the average person).\(^4\)

- These added sugars are often found in products that the average person would not expect to find them and are a non-nutritional source of calories

- The FDA has proposed changes to nutrition labels that would require labels to delineate the amount of added sugars that exist in a product per serving size.\(^5\)
  - Although proposed in 2014, these have yet to take effect
  - As of the time this project was completed, public comments were being accepted on the proposed changes

- Springfield, VT is a rural town with limited affordable options for groceries and a lack of healthy dining options
  - In a town with a large number of unemployed and low-wage workers, these facts present a barrier to health eating

- Obesity: 22% of Springfield’s adult population maintains a BMI of 30+ (considered obese).\(^6\)
Springfield has among the highest rates of hospitalizations for cardiovascular disease (CVD) in the state with 231 per 10,000 hospitalizations compared to 159 per 10,000 statewide\textsuperscript{6}

Similarly high numbers were reported for ER visits for CVD compared to the state 119.2 per 10,000 compared to 86.2 per 10,000 statewide\textsuperscript{6}

Hospitalizations of CVD result in a cost of $1149 per capita in Springfield compared to $884 per capita statewide\textsuperscript{6}

Therefore reducing the incidence of CVD related hospitalizations to statewide levels would result in a nearly 25% reduction in associated cost

CVD disproportionately affects the elderly

Windsor County, to which Springfield belongs, is an aging population with 16.8% of the population 65 years or older\textsuperscript{7}

Nationwide, the medical costs associated with CVD have been projected to reach numbers as high $800 billion by the year 2030\textsuperscript{8}

Preventive measures must be taken as this is unsustainable growth
Community Interviews

- Interviewed Registered Nurse who works as a Diabetes Educator (name withheld)
  - Discussed implementing new ways to reach the community and the need for materials for patients and community members to take home with them
  - Mentioned weekly group meetings that community members can attend to learn about nutrition and diabetes education
  - Discussed the importance of interpreting serving sizes and putting information into the patient perspective
Community Interviews

- Interviewed Registered Dietician at Health Center (name withheld)
  - Discussed need for repetition in educating patients as they are often overwhelmed by information
  - She has noticed that people often do not realize the amount of carbohydrates they consume and do not differentiate between whole grains and refined sugars
  - Acknowledged the lack of motivation in many patients to make changes as they see no incentive or alternatives
Intervention and Methodology

- Interviewed members of the Community Health Team (CHT) at Springfield Health Center
- Collaborated with them to identify a need for education within the community
- Created a pamphlet that will be distributed at CHT nutrition meetings
  - Pamphlet provides basic information on added sugars
    - Defines added sugars
    - Names many common places they are hidden
    - Provides alternative food suggestions for common foods with added sugar
    - Pamphlet also encourages patients to make decisions based on cost/benefit analysis and includes instructions on how to read labels
    - Created two versions: one with the current nutrition food labels and one with the proposed updated version so that the pamphlets will be available for use after the change
- The CHT will be free to distribute the pamphlet to any office within the Springfield Health Network
Results of Intervention

- The CHT was receptive to the design of the pamphlet and prepared to distribute it at future meetings.
- They will be able to assess the effectiveness of the pamphlet in educating the public, especially if the new FDA labels are accepted and implemented.
- The family medicine office will be able to use the pamphlet as well if desired, based on feedback from the CHT.
Evaluation of Effectiveness

- **Evaluation**
  - The burden of evaluating the effectiveness of this intervention will largely fall on the CHT
  - A potential method of evaluating the intervention would be a quick survey of CHT meeting participants
    - Have they read the pamphlet?
    - Have they discussed it with their family/friends?
    - Has it changed their diet or what foods they buy?

- **Limitations**
  - As this intervention seeks to educate the community, the main result will be qualitative in nature and difficult to evaluate directly
  - CVD is a chronic condition and the direct effect of reduced added sugar intake will be difficult to discern
Recommendations for Future Interventions

- As more research on added sugars emerges, the CHT could possibly incorporate a session on added sugars into their lessons.

- More materials could be produced beyond the pamphlet, including handouts geared towards different demographics.

- A pilot study could be performed to evaluated the effectiveness of increased education on added sugars and any discernible alterations in diet and lifestyle.
References


Appendix A – Pamphlet Design, Current

Front

**Sugar Quiz!**

**Question:** Which of the following has the LEAST amount of added sugars per serving?
- A. Pasta sauce
- B. Fat-free yogurt
- C. Granola bar

Open up to find out...

**Answer:**

Trick Question! They all have the same amount!

So? What’s the big deal?

Too much sugar in your diet puts you at increased risk for several diseases including heart disease, renal failure, and nerve damage!

What do you mean by "added" sugars?

Added sugars, also known as "free" sugars are those that are not a naturally occurring part of the food you are eating.

- Examples: adding table sugar to coffee would be "added" sugar, so is sugar added to baked goods like muffins, donuts, etc.

But How Much Added Sugar is Too Much?

- Health experts are now recommending less than 30 grams of added sugars per day
- The leading national brands of the foods on the quiz all had the same amount of added sugars per serving: 12 grams

All of those foods have that much added sugar?

Yes! It is very common to find added sugars in places you would LEAST expect them!

- Examples: sauces (BBQ, pasta, ketchup), "health" bars, fat-free products, sports drinks

Back

**What steps can I do to cut back on added sugars?**

**Step 1: Read the labels**

Nutrition Facts

- Start off by looking at how much sugar is in one serving
- Then look for sugar in the ingredients – if it’s in the first 3 listed, then don’t buy it!
- One way companies try to hide sugar is by renaming it
- Examples: Sucrose, molasses, evaporated cane juice, fructose, high-fructose corn syrup, caramel, turbinado, the list goes on... but they ALL are just SUGAR!

**Step 2: Cut back on sugary beverages – including juices**

- Sugary beverages are one of the main ways people get added sugars without even realizing it
- Cans of soda range from 40-50g of added sugar and 150 extra calories?

Is a 12oz bottle or can worth the 40-50g of added sugar and 150 extra calories?

You can lose upwards of 20 POUNDS of fat in one year just by cutting out soda

**Step 3: Healthier Alternatives**

OK, I’ve done steps 1 and 2. What CAN I actually eat??

- The hardest part of reducing added sugars is finding things to REPLACE them
- Instead of eating flavored yogurt, try adding fresh fruit to plain yogurt
- Instead of soda, drink seltzer water (many are similar to soda flavors)
- The BEST way to make changes in your diet is one step at a time!

- Make one change at a time and stick to it!
- You can do this. We are here to help.
Appendix B – Pamphlet Design, Proposed New Nutrition Label

Front

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- Examples: sauces (BBQ, pasta, ketchup), "health" bars, fat-free products, sports drinks

What steps can I do to cut back on added sugars?

Step 1: Read the labels

- Look at how many grams of added sugars there are.
- Then multiply it by the servings you'll eat – it can really add up!
- One way companies try to hide sugar in by reaming it!

Examples: Sucrose, molasses, evaporated cane juice, fructose, high-fructose corn syrup, caramel.

**BUT:** the list goes on... but they ALL are JUST SUGAR!

Step 2: Cut back on sugary beverages – including juices

- Sugary beverages are one of the main ways people get added sugars without even realizing it.
- Cans of soda range from 40-50 grams of added sugars!

Is a 12oz bottle or can worth the 40-50g of added sugar and 150 extra calories?

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Similar achievements can be made by cutting out fruit juices that add sugar.

Step 3: Healthier Alternatives

OK, I've done steps 1 and 2, what CAN I actually eat??

- The hardest part of reducing added sugars is finding things to REPLACE them.
- Instead of eating flavored yogurt, try adding fresh fruit to plain yogurt.
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