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THE JECH GALLERY

10 teaspoons of sugar makes the waistline expand

The prevalence of childhood obesity is rising and the mechanism of obesity development is believed to be related to multiple causes including physical inactivity and overconsumption of calories. In 2002, 30.3% of boys aged 2–15 years and 30.7% of girls were at least overweight, and 16% of boys and 15.9% of girls in this age group were obese.¹ The British consume about 2.25 million tonnes of sugar each year, three quarters of it indirectly in drinks, processed foods, and confectionery. Consumption is rising and disproportionately among younger people and particularly of soft sugary drinks.

Each 330 ml soft drink container includes the equivalent of about 10 teaspoons of sugar. The intake of these added sugars contributes to 16.7% of young people's energy intake, which is well above the recommendation of 11%.² Not only does consumption of these empty calories contribute to obesity,³ more than half of 4 to 18 year olds have some dental decay, largely caused by frequent consumption of these sugar laden products.²

Awareness of the nutritional content (predominantly sugar) of soft drinks may encourage more moderate consumption. Providing healthy alternatives has also been proposed, however unless children and parents are enlightened regarding the content and consequences of consumption of soft drinks, namely obesity, diabetes, and dental decay to name a few, behaviour change may be limited even in the presence of healthy alternatives.

A simple health promotion campaign to improve awareness of the quantity of sugar in soft drinks (roughly 10 teaspoons) could provide the means of enlightening the population to the vast sugar content of soft drinks. Can you picture what 10 teaspoons of sugar looks like? Figure 1 illustrates this. The



Photograph by Richard Hewitt.

association between soft drinks and sugar needs to be highlighted. This may encourage consumption of alternative drinks to quench the thirst.

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