

POLICY FACTSHEET

Sugar sweetened drinks and cancer prevention

The World Cancer Research Fund's Cancer Prevention Recommendations advise everyone to limit consumption of sugar sweetened drinks as part of everyday life to lower cancer risk¹ and to support living well with and beyond cancer².

This factsheet outlines how this recommendation can be rolled out at a population level. It expands advice in World Cancer Research Fund International's Policy Blueprint for cancer prevention, which combines evidence on cancer risk – our Cancer Prevention Recommendations – with policy advice for population-level prevention.



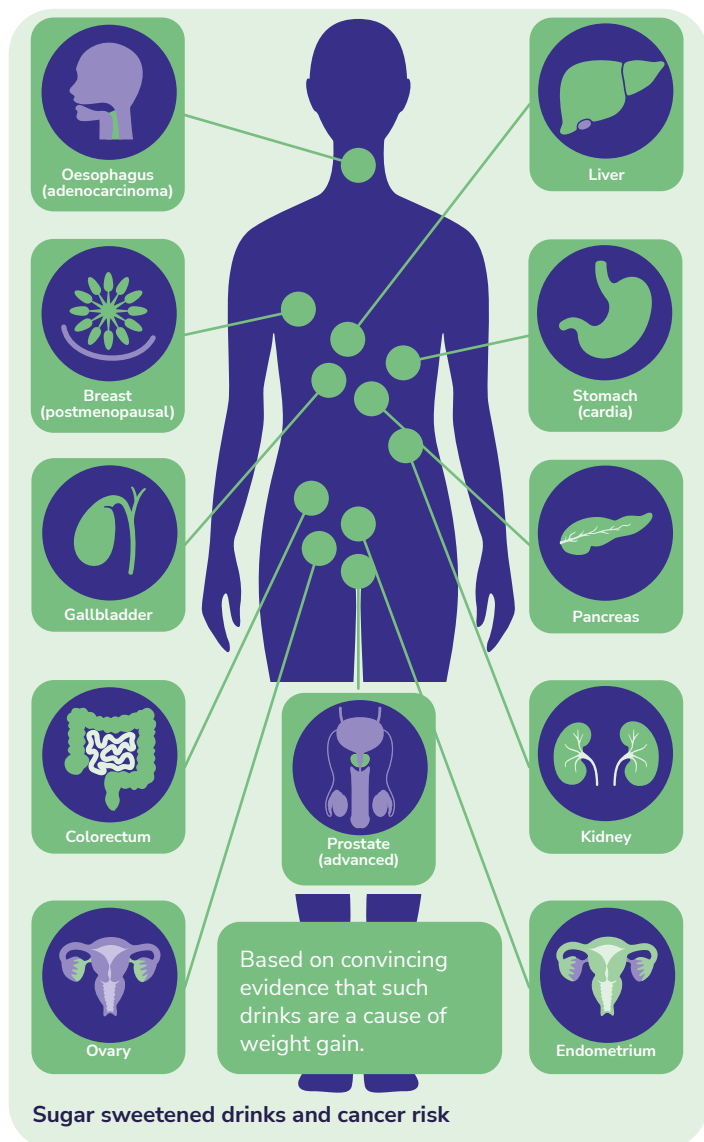
CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATION:

Limit consumption of sugar sweetened drinks

Do not consume sugar sweetened drinks and drink mostly water and unsweetened drinks.

For more details, see: wcrf.org/evidence-for-our-recommendations/limit-sugar-sweetened-drinks

Between 2008-2023, the consumption of soft drinks, excluding bottled water, has increased by 21.2% globally, with particularly high growth in Africa, Asia Pacific and the Middle East³.



There are 6 key policy areas to support healthy environments for limiting consumption of sugar sweetened drinks:



Marketing restrictions



Healthy and safe schools



Fiscal and legal policies



Effectively inform people



Procurement, planning and incentives in communities



Counselling in healthcare

Unlocking the co-benefits of cancer prevention policies

Our policy recommendations have co-benefits in relation to prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), meeting sustainability targets, reversing health inequities, addressing commercial determinants of health and fulfilling human rights. World Cancer Research Fund International's Policy Blueprint for cancer prevention includes an assessment of co-benefits and potential trade-offs when policy goals do not align.

wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention

Marketing restrictions



- Mandatory advertising ban of foods high in fat, sugars and salt, sugary drinks and identifiable less healthy products, online and on TV.
- Restrictions on other types of marketing such as product placement, branding and multi-buy offers.
- Restrictions on sponsorship of sporting events by fast food and sugary drinks companies.

Fiscal and legal policies



- Taxes on sugar sweetened drinks, regularly adjusted to inflation.
- Measures to ensure reformulation initiatives for sugar sweetened drinks are incentivised via taxes.

Counselling in healthcare



- Nutrition counselling in primary care.
- Nutrition training for health professionals.

An integrated strategy which together addresses the influence of diet, weight, breastfeeding, physical activity and alcohol consumption will have a greater impact on cancer risk and survivorship than individual factors alone. For more information, visit wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention

Procurement, planning and incentives in communities



- Nutrition standards for public procurement that exclude sugar sweetened drinks.
- Policies to ensure access to drinking water.

Healthy and safe schools and other settings



- Restrictions on unhealthy drinks available in schools canteens, kiosks, vending machines and school events, including sporting events.
- Policies to ensure access to drinking water in schools.

Effectively inform people



- Robust front-of-pack food labelling that includes sugar sweetened drinks and is based on a government-approved nutrient profile model.



Strategies to support our policy recommendations on sugar sweetened drinks

- There is limited evidence that the artificial sweetener aspartame used in non-sugar sweetened beverages is carcinogenic in humans. The Recommendation to drink mostly water and avoid sweetened drinks remains appropriate. Therefore, ensure policy supports appropriate access to drinking water.
- Avoid voluntary reformulation agreements with producers of sugar sweetened drinks, which have been shown not to work. Instead, use taxes to incentivise reformulation.
- Implement marketing bans to tackle health inequalities. There is evidence that marketing of sugar sweetened beverages disproportionately targets the most deprived populations and young people.
- Follow international guidance, including the WHO NCD Best Buys⁴.

Our other resources for policy-makers, health professionals and the general public

Resources for policy-makers

- NOURISHING nutrition policy database policydatabase.wcrf.org
- NOURISHING nutrition policy index for Europe and country snapshots wcrf.org/policy/nutrition-policy



Building Momentum reports:

- Lessons on implementing robust restrictions of food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing to children
- Lessons on implementing a robust front-of-pack food label
- Lessons on implementing a robust sugar-sweetened beverage tax
wcrf.org/policy/our-publications/building-momentum-series

Resources for health professionals and the general public

- wcrf.org/living-well
- aicr.org/resources/media-library
- Resources in Dutch wkof.nl

References

1. Malcomson FC, Wiggins C, Parra-Soto S, et al. Adherence to the 2018 World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research Cancer Prevention Recommendations and cancer risk: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cancer*. 2023;129(17):2655-2670.
2. Shams-White MM, Brockton NT, Mitrou P, Kahle LL, Reedy J. The 2018 World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research (WCRF/AICR) Score and All-Cause, Cancer, and Cardiovascular Disease Mortality Risk: A Longitudinal Analysis in the NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study. *Curr Dev Nutr*. 2022;6(6):nzac096.
3. World Health Organization. Global report on the use of sugar-sweetened beverage taxes, 2023. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023.
4. World Health Organization. Tackling NCDs: best buys and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. World Health Organization; 2024.

About us

World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on the links between diet, nutrition, weight and physical activity and cancer. We are an international not-for-profit association that leads and unifies a network of cancer prevention charities, including the American Institute for Cancer Research, World Cancer Research Fund in the UK and Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands. World Cancer Research Fund International is in official relations with the World Health Organization.

Acknowledgements

For a full list of acknowledgements please scan the QR code.



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