COPE WEBINAR SERIES FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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Global Food Policy to Prevent Obesity: Current Evidence and Recommendations

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Moderator: Lisa Diewald MS, RD, LDN
Program Manager
MacDonald Center for Obesity Prevention and Education

OBJECTIVES

• Understand the current evidence about the link between obesity prevention policy and dietary intake, obesity and chronic disease.

• Explore the various regulatory options being proposed and recommended as well as the obesity prevention policy knowledge gaps existing in the U.S. and around the world.

• Discuss the current and future state of regulatory options around the world.

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GLOBAL FOOD POLICY TO PREVENT OBESITY: CURRENT EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lindsey Smith Taillie, PhD
Research Assistant Professor, Nutrition
Gillings School of Global Health
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

DISCLOSURE

Neither the planners or presenter have any conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Can We Prevent Obesity with Food Policy?
*Perspectives from Across the Globe*

Lindsey Smith Taillie, PhD, MPH

**Overview**

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2. Explore the various regulatory options being proposed and recommended as well as the obesity prevention policy knowledge gaps existing in the U.S. and around the world.

3. Discuss the current and future state of regulatory options around the world.

**Why Food Policy?**

*Lancet* 2016, NCD Risk Factor Collaboration

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Global increases in:
- Added caloric sweeteners:
  - Beverages
  - Packaged foods
  - Animal-source foods
- Refined carbohydrates, ultra-processed foods
- Problematic dietary behaviors:
  - Increased snacking
  - Away-from-home eating
  - Convenience and ready-to-heat food
  - Increased portion sizes
  - Edible oils for frying (unique to LMICs)

Global decreases in:
- Legumes, vegetables, fruits in most countries
- Food preparation time
- Physical activity

Why regulate sugary drinks?
- Average American drinks >38 gallons of soda/year (eight 12-oz cans/week)
- A top source of calories in children and teens diets (116 kcal/day)
- 60% of added sugar intake
- One 12-oz can of regular cola contains 9 teaspoons of added sugars
  - AHA recommends 6 tsp per day for women & 9 tsp/day for men
- Industry history of super-sizing

Why regulate sugary drinks?
- Health risks:
  - Promotes weight gain
    - Children: 55% greater odds of overweight/obesity
    - Adults: 27% more likely to become overweight/obese
  - Promotes diabetes
    - Increased risk of diabetes even after accounting for impact on weight
  - Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease
    - Daily consumption increases fat deposits in the liver by 150%
  - Coronary heart disease
  - Tooth decay
- Costly:
  - Costs for obese individual are 150% higher ($2,741/year) than normal weight
  - Diabetes cost $245 billion in 2012

A growing and global problem

For some companies, that can mean specifically focusing on young people, as Almut Boer, president of Coca-Cola International, described to investors in 2014. “Half the world’s population has not had a Coke in the last 30 days,” he said. “There’s 600 million teenagers who have not had a Coke in the last week. So the opportunity for that is huge.”

New York Times, September 2017
Why regulate “junk” food?

- Excess sugar: 75% of US food supply has added sugar
  - Increased weight and CVD risk
- Excess sodium:
  - Linked to higher blood pressure & CVD risk
- Excess saturated fat
  - Mixed evidence, but appears to be food-based
  - Linked to higher CVD risk
- Excess trans fat:
  - Raises LDL cholesterol, lowers HDL cholesterol
  - Associated with increased risk of CVD, stroke, etc.
- Combined into highly palatable ultra-processed foods
  - Consume more of them
- Passive overconsumption & glycemic index
- Evidence of addiction/habituation
  - Behavioral and neurochemical changes: bingeing, withdrawal, craving

An example: Lunchables

From The New York Times, 2013

When I asked Geoffrey Bened, former CEO of Philip Morris, about this shift toward more sugar, salt and fat in meal kits for kids, he smiled and noted that even in its earliest incarnations, Lunchables was held up for criticism. “One article said something like, ‘If you give Lunchables away, you’re making healthy food to a few of them,’” he said.

Well, they did have a good bit of fat, I thought. “Yes, but,” he said. “It’s not healthy.”
$27 million dollars in advertising on Lunchables in 2012
- Children age 6-11 saw >1 ad for Lunchables per week
- Web traffic
- Placement in stores

**Rudd Center Report on Marketing Facts in Focus**

**Bottom line:** Food science, marketing, and pricing combine to create an obesogenic food environment where weight maintenance is difficult

**An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure**
- Benjamin Franklin

"Don't eat anything your great-great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food."
- Michael Pollan

**“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”**
- Michael Pollan

How to work within existing food system?
Who is responsible?

- Debate about who has the responsibility to take action:
  - Individual
  - Society

Policy Options

Taxes

Fiscal policies

Taxes:
- Elements:
  - Need to be large enough to drive change
  - Healthy substitutes (that are less expensive)
- Main concerns:
  - Are they regressive?

Sugary drink taxes around the world
Sugary drink taxes in the U.S.

Berkeley’s Sugary Beverage Tax

- Penny-per-ounce excise tax passed on Nov 2014
- Taxed beverages: sugary sodas, juice drinks, sports and energy drinks, coffees and teas
- Intent to raise revenue for children’s health programs
- Study: examine change in price, sales, and intake of sugary beverages

Nutrition labeling: front of package options

Example: Smart Choices

Nutrition labeling: exercise equivalents
Example: Competing claims

Nutrition labeling around the globe

- Netherlands: Choices logo
- South Korea, Canada, & the US: mandatory trans fat labeling
- New Zealand: Pick the Tick logo
- Washington State: mandatory menu labeling

All led to reformulations that improved the nutrient profile of products on the market. No evidence (yet) of individual behavior change.

- More recently: Chile & Ecuador warning labels

Nutrition labeling: Chile & Ecuador

Nutrition labeling: Updated NFP in US

US Warning labels

Marketing
Marketing: it’s everywhere!

- **TV & Movie Celebrities Endorsements**
- Schools: fundraisers, materials, sports events

Why regulate marketing?

- **Children are exposed to marketing:**
  - Mostly unhealthy foods & drinks high in fat, salt, and/or sugar
  - In large amounts
  - Across every media platform (broadcast, print, digital)
  - In many environments (schools, sports events, stores, restaurants)
  - Using sophisticated techniques and child appeals

- **Unhealthy food marketing affects children’s:**
  - Product and brand preferences
  - Purchase requests (‘pester power’)
  - Eating/consumption behaviors

- **Children (and teens) are uniquely vulnerable:**
  - Highly impressionable
  - Cannot yet recognize advertising intent
  - Lack nutritional knowledge
  - Motivated by immediate gratification rather than long-term consequences

Options for marketing regulations

- **Stronger Regulations**
  - **Comprehensive:** covering all media, places where children gather, and techniques used to reach children
  - **Protected children:** Good — inclusive ages + low audience thresholds; Better — Complete bans
  - **Child appeals techniques** — use to identify child-targeted marketing and/or prohibit use on HFSS products
  - **Use strict nutrition standards**
  - **Restrict use of health claims**

Countries with voluntary industry self-regulation

- Chile: strongest law to date
  - **Strengths**
    - Applies to unhealthy foods & beverages, uses uniform nutrition criteria across categories
    - Restrictions address both power of advertisements to influence (by restricting child appeals) and children’s exposure
    - Universal 6a–10p ban beginning 2018 reduces ad-shifting
    - Connected to FOP warning labels
    - Includes comprehensive in-school restriction
    - Includes brand equity characters
**Food Industry Response**

- Beverage set goals to reduce sugar content
- American Beverage Association aims for 20% reduction in beverage calories by year 2025
- British Soft Drinks Association pledged 20% fewer calories by 2020

**Options:**
- Offer more products without or with less sugar (no/low-calorie drinks)
- Reduce serving sizes
- Reformulate/reduce sugar content of existing portfolio

**Product Reformulations**

- Stealth vs. overt reformulations
- Company pledges
  - Cereal companies, especially children’s cereals: Rudd Center examined 22 varieties in 2009 vs. 2012
  - 45% had less sodium
  - 32% had less sugar
  - 23% had more fiber
- Lunchables: by 2011, reduced salt, sugar, and fat by 10%

**New products introduced**

- Lean turkey, white meat only
- American pasteurized prepackaged cheese product
- Crackers: Double Stuf Oreo cookies
- Oven-roasted turkey
- Monterey jack cheese
- Whole wheat crackers
- Harvest blend trail mix
- Kettle corn crunch
- Chocolate-covered pretzels
- Lean turkey, white meat only
- American pasteurized prepared cheese product
- Crackers: Double Stuf Oreo cookies
- Oven-roasted turkey
- Monterey jack cheese
- Whole wheat crackers
- Harvest blend trail mix
- Kettle corn crunch
- Chocolate-covered pretzels

**Portion size changes**

- **Oven-roasted turkey**
  - Monterey jack cheese
  - Whole wheat crackers
  - Harvest blend trail mix
  - Kettle corn crunch
  - Chocolate-covered pretzels

- **Lean turkey, white meat only**
  - American pasteurized prepared cheese product
  - Crackers: Double Stuf Oreo cookies

**Does it work?**

- Pledge to cut 1 trillion calories from the US food supply

**But evaluations found:**

1. These companies were already selling fewer calories before the pledge — so was everyone else.
2. Based on pre-pledge trends, these companies should have been selling even fewer calories than they did.
Final points

- Food policy goal:
  - not to eliminate choice but make the healthier choice preferred

- How quickly and effectively policies work will depend on:
  - Social, economic, historical, and political contexts
    - Need to tailor to population

- Combination of actions will be needed to be mutually reinforcing and effective

- Evidence is still developing:
  - Health-related taxes: strong
  - Labeling, Marketing, others: TBA

- Ultimate goal: create systemic change
  - Improve diet
  - Reduce obesity

Lindsey Smith Taillie
taillie@unc.edu

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- Complete the evaluation soon after receiving it. It will expire after 3 weeks.
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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

UPCOMING COPE WEBINARS

October 11  Metabolically Healthy Obesity: Myth or Reality?
Carrie Dennett MPH, RDN, CD
Nutrition counselor and freelance writer
Nutrition for Carrie and Menu for Change, Seattle WA

November 15  Food Marketing to Youth
Maria Roma-Palao RD, PhD
Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity

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