

Addressing sugar addiction holistically

LETTERS

Friday, 31 Aug 2018



THE article "Government mulling soda tax to encourage healthy living" (*The Star*, Aug 27) is timely.

Diabetes is a major public health concern in Malaysia, and the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes has escalated to 20.8% in adults above the age of 30, affecting 2.8 million individuals.

The burden of managing diabetes falls on primary and tertiary healthcare providers operating in various settings.

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Many countries, notably Latvia, has banned sweetened cordials in supermarkets, and anywhere else for that matter. Fruit juices sold in Tetra Pak packaging are either unsweetened or contain only a regulated amount of permitted sugar.

As proposed by Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a soda tax would be an excellent way to control consumer behaviour.

It should not just be about calories, ADHD, obesity, diabetes and dental caries. It's also about weaning the public away from their sugar addiction, which also means controlling the amount of artificial sweeteners in food and drinks so that the public gets used to tasting less sweetness.

Hence, there is also a psychological dimension to sugar that needs to be articulated and addressed.

Another concern is sweetened condensed milk. *Warung* and restaurants use condensed milk as their shelf life is longer than unsweetened evaporated milk or creamer without refrigeration.

Due to our hot climate, fresh milk and evaporated milk will spoil quickly without refrigeration. The sugar in sweetened condensed milk and creamers act as a preservative for a longer shelf life.

This issue needs to be addressed in a holistic manner as we can't afford to have half-baked public policies.

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I propose that we ban the import and sale of sweetened cordials and educate the public on the dangers of sugar.

We should announce that in one year's time, the government will limit the quantity of sugar allowed in packaged and bottled drinks and beverages including powdered drink mixes.

Drinks that do not comply with this limit will be subject to the soda tax.

We need to give a year's grace period for manufacturers to reformulate their recipes.

A year later, we should implement the soda tax and announce that it will be doubled in a year's time for drinks that exceed the mandated amount of sugar.

We should launch public awareness campaigns on healthier options.

If the steps stated above are implemented in stages, I am very optimistic that there will be a drastic reduction in the prevalence of diabetes and dental caries among the population at large.

Only through awareness and self-realisation can we achieve the goal.

A panel of medical, dental and other experts should be consulted to decide on the amount, or to save the trouble of reinventing the wheel, follow standards set by best practices worldwide.

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AGENCY: The Star (Online)

LINK: <https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/letters/2018/08/31/addressing-sugar-addiction-holistically/>