

8/10/08

Submission to:

House Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

Inquiry into Obesity in Australia

from:

Lynn

Terms of Reference:

The Committee will inquire into and report on the increasing prevalence of obesity in the Australian population, focusing on future implications for Australia's health system.

The Committee will recommend what governments, industry, individuals and the broader community can do to prevent and manage the obesity epidemic in children, youth and adults.

Submission:

1. In support of my submission, I recommend to the Committee and Inquiry a recently published book by David Gillespie "Sweet Poison Why Sugar Makes You Fat" published by Viking, 2008. I recommend that Committee members and the Inquiry staff read this book in order to understand the significance of sugar in contributing to the current problems of obesity and type 2 diabetes.
2. "Sweet Poison Why Sugar Makes You Fat" is well researched. It outlines in a readable style understandable by a non scientific audience why sugar is the cause of much obesity in modern society. After many unsuccessful weight loss efforts by following weight loss diets, the author engaged in his own research and arrived at eliminating sugar from his diet as the solution. By doing so he lost 40 kilograms over two years and has retained the weight loss. This last part is most significant as many people who follow weight loss diets eventually regain the weight when they stop the diet.
3. I too have done considerable research which supports the author's conclusion that the increased consumption of sugar in our modern diet is a major contributor to increased rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes, as well as dental caries.
4. How to engage the public to reduce, much less eliminate, sugar from their diet will not be an easy task but is, nevertheless in my view, one which the Committee and Inquiry should include among the recommendations aimed at reducing obesity and type 2 diabetes. Additionally reduction in sugar consumption should make a significant contribution in reducing dental caries and reduce the cost of providing

adequate dental care for the nation, although this may be less of an issue where there is fluoride in water.

5. In my view the Committee and Inquiry needs to come up with two different sorts of recommendations and actions – one lot which is directed at the already obese to assist them in losing weight and retaining the weight loss and the other should be directed at preventing excessive weight gain. As one might say “one size does not fit all”.
6. The elimination, or near elimination, of sugar from the diets of the obese is an appropriate and likely to be successful approach while reduction in sugar consumption is more likely to be successful among the not yet obese or overweight.
7. People are subduced into a false sense of weight management effort by “low fat” labels on processed food items which also contain sugar. Any good which may be attained by the reduction in fat consumption is negated by the sugar additive, which the purchaser may not be aware of. Labelling should indicate clearly if the item contains added sugar and that sugar makes you fat.
8. Eliminating sugar from all processed non “sweet” food items is not practicable. However, people need to know that the food they are purchasing contains added sugar when they may not expect it, such as in baked beans and canned fish.
9. Accordingly, I recommend the Committee and Inquiry recommend:
 - a. Education campaigns should include information to tell people that sugar makes you fat, is a major cause of obesity and we eat too much of it;
 - b. Education campaigns directed at the obese should include encouragement to eliminate sugar from their diet (as well as a moderate, achievable and sustainable exercise program for general well being);
 - c. Processed food containing added sugar of any kind from any source should be clearly labelled to indicate that the processed food item contains added sugar and that sugar is a major contributor to weight gain;
 - d. Fruit juices should contain labels with indicate they contain high levels of fructose and a high sugar content which contributes to causing obesity;
 - e. Companies which produce processed food in Australia should be encouraged, including with financial incentives, to also produce items which do not contain added sugar and to label and actively market them as such as part of an education campaign to encourage people to purchase items without added sugar, much like the heart smart campaign. There should also be financial incentives for the import and sale of processed food which does not contain added sugar.