

April 11, 2018

Testimony for the House Human Services Committee

Thank you for letting me speak with you today, in strong support of S.70 as an amazingly strong first step towards helping VT children avoid the obesity epidemic. I am a practicing pediatrician in Burlington, and the immediate Past President of the American Academy of Pediatrics VT Chapter. In the 33 years that I have been in practice, I have seen VT's obesity rate climb steadily from nearly 11% in 1990 to almost 25% today. When you count in the number of Vermonters who are also overweight, this represents over 60% of Vermont's adults and 29% of Vermont's children and youth.

What do I see in my office? I see children with Type 2 Diabetes – which used to be so rare in children that I didn't even learn about it in medical school and my pediatric residency! I see preschoolers who have to have most of their teeth pulled because of caries. I see school-aged children at higher risk of being bullied because of their weight, who then don't want to participate in PE, or don't want to go to school. I see children and adolescents who are depressed.

I also see parents who love their children and are trying to do their best. We talk about soda and sugary beverages in the office, but my words of advice are anemic compared to the sophisticated advertising supporting the consumption of these unhealthy beverages! Making beverages that are healthy for children the easy, default option when ordering a "child meal" is a huge help to parents (and grandparents) who are trying to do the right thing.

Of course, the obesity epidemic is extremely complicated, and we can't blame it all on sugary beverages. BUT – sugary beverages do play an extremely significant role.

Here are some facts:

- Consumption of sugar sweetened beverages has increased 500% in the past 50 years, and is now the single largest category of caloric intake in children, surpassing milk in the late 1990s
- Sugar sweetened beverages account for at least 1/5 of the weight gained between 1977 and 2007 in the US population
- A person who drinks one extra can (only 12 oz) of soda a day would gain 15 lbs in a year
- Pure liquid sugar also does not "fill us up" or induce satiety, the same way that fast food (that also contains fat and protein) does. These empty calories do not make us feel full. Therefore, there is inadequate calorie compensation - people are more likely to drink these extra calories in addition to other foods they are eating, rather than instead of these foods
- Children who drink sugar sweetened beverages tend to drink less milk – this displaces vital nutrients, such as calcium and vitamin D that children need.

What does the research show?

- Sugar sweetened beverage intake increases weight gain at all ages:

- DeBoer, Scharf, Demmer in 2013 followed a cohort of over 10,000 young children and showed that sugar sweetened beverage consumption was linked with abnormal weight gain, independent of SES, maternal obesity, and TV viewing (although these are all linked)
- Pan, Ruowei Li, Park, Galuska – CDC, 2014, followed 1,200 children and found that obesity prevalence at age 6 among children who consumed SSBs was twice as high as that among non-SSB consumers (17% vs 8.6%)

Most children don't go to restaurants every day, so why make such a big deal about having a sugar sweetened beverage a couple of times a week? (Although it is estimated that 25% of children's calories come from restaurant food and beverages – which is NOT insignificant!)

- Thomas et al (2004) followed 644 children aged 7-11 for 1 school year. They found that the group of children who drank an average of 50 ml more soda a day increased their percent of overweight and obesity by 7.5%! This is remarkable!!

Why not just educate people?

- We already do - there is NOTHING in soda that is good for you.
- **Health education and behavior change is complex – it works much better to make the healthier choice the easier choice.**

Thank you!

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