

UK'S SUGAR REDUCTION PROGRAMME



In 2017, the government introduced a Sugar Reduction Programme, with a **20% reduction in sugar levels in certain key contributors to children's sugar intake expected by 2020**. The 2019 progress report showed that **only a 3% reduction had been achieved**¹. The government previously committed to reviewing alternative levers if not enough progress was made², but the final report has not been published and no further action taken, despite a clear need.

Action on Sugar strongly recommends that the government **implements a comprehensive, well-designed and mandatory sugar reduction programme** to drive the food industry to reformulate their products with lower sugar levels for better human, environmental and economic health.

Policy Summary

Reformulation involves food companies improving the nutrition profile of their products, gradually reducing harmful elements such as excess sugar. This removes the barrier of behaviour change or financial considerations for customers, who can continue to buy the same products, but with less sugar.

The Sugar Reduction Programme aimed to reduce sugar in certain key contributors to children's sugar intake including breakfast cereals, yogurts, biscuits, and cakes. The target 20% reduction was the same across all products; and could be achieved through reformulation, reducing portion size, or shifting sales to lower sugar products².

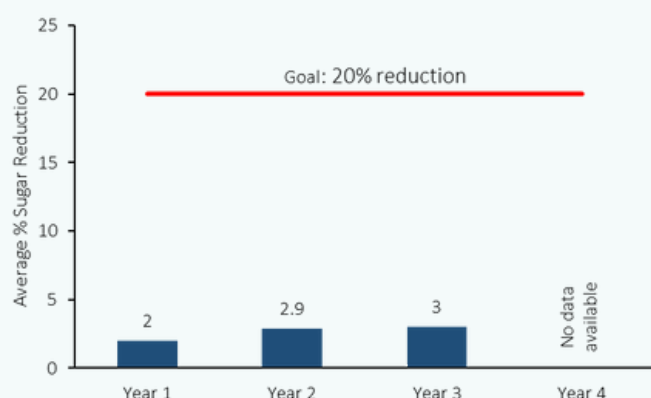
What is the need for sugar reduction?

- **Excess sugar intake is linked to various health issues:** tooth decay, obesity, liver disease, type 2 diabetes and high LDL cholesterol⁵. Oral diseases are the leading reason children aged 5-9 years are admitted to hospital, with 32,140 admissions in 2018-2019⁶.
- **Harvesting sugar beet, the UK's domestic source of sugar, is causing irreversible damage to our soils**⁷. Using prime agricultural land to make more sugar available for consumption – a crop which we need to eat much less of – is contrary to public health needs and environmentally damaging.
- Public Health England's 2015 analysis showed that **reducing average energy intake from sugar to the recommended 5% over the next 15 years would prevent 3,500 deaths** and avoid 173,000 dental caries cases annually, whilst also saving the NHS £396m each year⁸.
- National Food Strategy analysis showed that **if the Sugar Reduction Programme targets were met, UK economic output could grow by £2.2-5.7bn** as a result of the larger and healthier workforce⁹.

Public Support

- **Sugar levels are public's most common concern** about food they eat:
- 2 in 3 said sugar content was their leading concern³.
- 9 in 10 people support government working with food industry to make everyday foods and drinks healthier⁴.

Food industry progress so far ¹



Our recommendations

- Publish the final Sugar Reduction Programme Report.
- Implement a simple programme with **specific, upper limits for all contributing categories of sugar to the diet** (inc. alcohol and infant food). Mirror the government's well-designed salt programme.
- Make it **mandatory** to create a 'level-playing field' for industry: enforce compliance and reward progress by imposing **financial penalties for non-compliance, plus explore other fiscal measures**, such as preferential business rates for companies that produce a higher proportion of healthier foods.

References

1. Public Health England. Sugar reduction: report on progress between 2015 and 2019. 2020; Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/984282/Sugar_reduction_progress_report_2015_to_2019-1.pdf
2. Public Health England. Sugar Reduction: Achieving the 20% A technical report outlining progress to date, guidelines for industry, 2015 baseline levels in key foods and next steps. 2017. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/604336/Sugar_reduction_achieving_the_20_.pdf
3. Food Standards Agency. Food and You 2 - Wave 3. 2022 [cited 2022 May 24]. Available from: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-3>
4. Overwhelming public support for sugar and calorie reduction [Internet]. GOV.UK. 2018 [cited 2022 May 27]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/overwhelming-public-support-for-sugar-and-calorie-reduction>
5. European Food Safety Authority. Sugar Factsheet. 2021. Available from: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-07/sugars-factsheet-en.pdf>
6. NHS Digital. Hospital Admitted Patient Care Activity 2018-19. 2019 [cited 2022 May 27]. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2018-19>
7. Feedback. Too Much of a Bad Thing: The use and misuse of UK soil and land to grown sugar. 2019. Available from: <https://feedbackglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Too-much-of-a-bad-thing-the-use-and-misuse-of-land-and-soils-to-grow-sugar-Feedback-2019.pdf>
8. Public Health England. Sugar Reduction The evidence for action. 2015. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470179/Sugar_reduction_The_evidence_for_action.pdf
9. Dumbleby H. National Food Strategy Independent Review: The Plan. 2021. Available from: <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>