

Tax fizzy drinks and ban junk food ads, say doctors

By James Gallagher Health and science reporter, BBC News

Obesity is the "single greatest" threat to health, say the doctors

Fizzy drinks should be heavily taxed and junk food adverts banished until after the watershed, doctors have said, in a call for action over obesity. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, which represents nearly every doctor in the UK, said ballooning waistlines already constituted a "huge crisis". Its report said current measures were failing and called for unhealthy foods to be treated more like cigarettes.

Industry leaders said the report added little to the debate on obesity.

The UK is one of the most obese nations in the world with about a quarter of adults [classified as obese](#). That figure is predicted to double by 2050 - a third of primary school leavers are already overweight.

Doctors fear that a rising tide of obesity will pose dire health consequences for the nation. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges is a "united front" of the medical profession from surgeons to GPs and psychiatrists to paediatricians. It says its doctors are seeing the consequences of unhealthy diets every day and that it has never come together on such an issue before.

Its recommendations include:

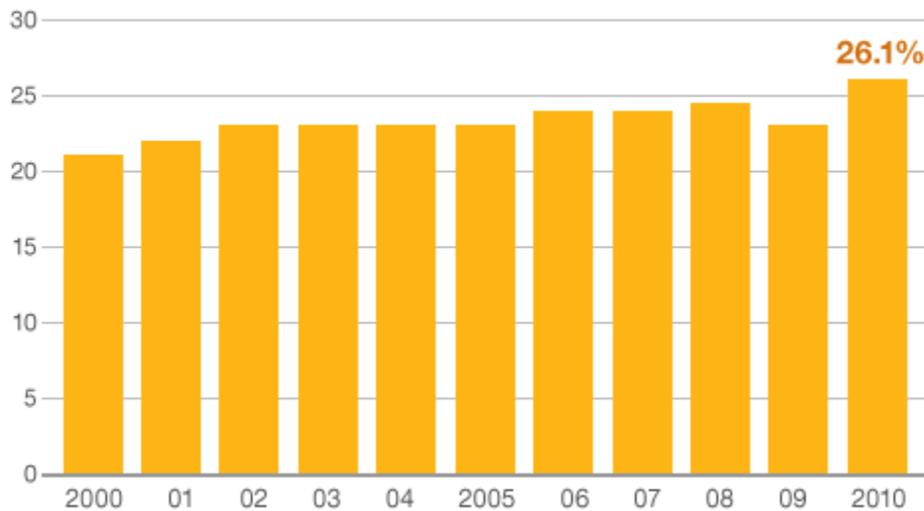
- A ban on advertising foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt before 9pm
- Further taxes on sugary drinks to increase prices by at least 20%
- A reduction in fast food outlets near schools and leisure centres
- A £100m budget for interventions such as weight-loss surgery
- No junk food or vending machines in hospitals, where all food must meet the same nutritional standards as in schools
- Food labels to include calorie information for children

Prof Terence Stephenson, the chair of the Academy, evoked parallels with the campaign against smoking.

He told the BBC: "That required things like a ban on advertising and a reduction in marketing and the association of smoking with sporting activities - that helped people move away from smoking."

Obesity in the UK

total adult population, %



Source: OECD

He said there was no "silver-bullet" for tackling obesity, instead the entire culture around eating needed to change to make it easier to make healthy decisions.

"I choose what I eat or whether I smoke, what people have told us is they want help to swim with the tide rather than against the current to make the healthy choice the easy one," he said.

While the report makes a raft of recommendations, Prof Stephenson attacked sugary drinks for being "just water and sugar" and lambasted a culture where it was deemed acceptable to drink a litre of fizzy drink at the cinema.

A tax was needed to help "encourage people to drink more healthy drinks," he said.

"Doctors are often accused of playing the nanny state, we didn't hear from a single person who said they liked being overweight, everybody we met wanted help from the state and society".

"If we didn't have things like this we wouldn't have speed limits that save lives, we wouldn't have drink-driving limits that save lives, there's a host of things that society and state does to help us live long, healthy fulfilling lives and we're just suggesting something similar."