

# UNILEVER'S POSITION ON SUGAR / SUGAR REDUCTION



## Background

Many authorities have expressed concern that consuming too much sugar can increase risks of excessive energy intake. Sustained excess energy intake, from any source, without sufficient physical activity leads to weight gain and potentially obesity, an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Most concern is oriented towards 'free' sugar, which includes added sugar and sugar from juices and concentrates, but does not include sugar naturally found and consumed in intact fruits and vegetables and in dairy.

## Context

Sugar is present in foods and beverages as a natural part of some ingredients, and also added for its sweetening properties and for technical reasons such as to provide texture, structure, colour and flavour to a product or to help preserve it. As sweetness is one of the basic taste sensations, sugar plays an important role in enjoyment and pleasure of the product for the consumer.

Sugar is added to some Unilever products, such as powdered and ready-to-drink iced teas, ice creams, breakfast cereals, certain dressings (e.g. ketchup), pasta sauces, main dishes and soups.

## Unilever's position

Sugar plays an important role in our products by providing sweetness as well as structural properties; for example, it enhances the creamy texture of ice cream, making it softer to serve. We want to use sugar responsibly, whilst matching technical needs and consumer preferences.

We support the position that energy intake from sugar should be limited in line with recommendations by a number of organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), and this is explicitly recognised in our 'Future Foods' initiative.

## Use of low-energy sweeteners

Many consumers like a certain sweetness in foods and beverages. We are able to reduce the overall sugar level and maintain consumer preference to a certain extent. To reduce sugar further we can add sweetness by replacing sugar (fully or partially) with low-energy sweeteners. Approved low-energy sweeteners are safe for use in foods and beverages when



consumed at allowed levels. Their use in place of sugar mitigates the risks of excess energy intakes associated with sugar and dental caries. We support the responsible use of low-energy sweeteners as a way to replace sugars in foods and beverages, including for children, while maintaining consumer acceptance, and we advocate for their use as part of our sugar reduction toolkit. We focus on nature-derived sweeteners to meet consumers' preference for ingredients from a natural source.



### **Working with others**

We want to work together with governments, NGOs and all food chain stakeholders to find the best solutions that have a positive impact on public health, including limiting/reducing sugar.

This could be via collaborative programmes initiated by governments or other stakeholders as well as by industries. They can be voluntary or mandatory in nature, provided they meet certain conditions, e.g.

- Collaborative approach with industry involved to set realistic criteria and timings.
- Targets based on sound scientific evidence and consensus, in line with WHO recommendations on maximum sugar intake to have clear impact on public health.
- Creating a level playing field among all food industry players.
- Taking into account technological limitations and the need to maintain consumers' product acceptance, e.g. role of sugar in product, standard of identity.
- Lifts potential regulatory hurdles (e.g. use of sweeteners).
- Supported by consumer awareness/education campaigns developed and led by government agencies or NGOs.
- External monitoring systems put in place to monitor progress on targets and public health impact, led by government or independent agencies, preferably with limited reporting burden to participants through the use of joint reporting mechanisms as relevant.

### **What did we achieve already?**

As part of the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan launched in 2010, we have already taken the following steps to offer consumers products with less sugar and fewer calories, e.g.

- In 2020, we achieved our commitment to double the proportion of our portfolio that meets Unilever's highest nutritional standards. These highest nutritional standards include benchmarks for salt, saturated fat, sugar and calories.
- We achieved 23% sugar reduction across our ready-to-drink teas, powdered iced tea and milk tea products by 2020.
- In 2014, we fulfilled our commitment to ensure that 100% of our children's ice creams\* will contain 110 kcal or fewer per serving\*\*.
- In 2015, we fulfilled our commitment to ensure that 80% of our packaged ice cream products will not exceed 250 kcal per serving\*\*.
- Furthermore, we have launched low calorie ready-to-drink iced teas, iced tea powder mixes and concentrates and portion-controlled ice creams to offer great tasting choices with less sugar and fewer calories.



We focus on beverages and ice cream because that is where we can have the biggest impact on sugar reduction and therefore public health. However, this does not mean that we limit our sugar reduction activities only to those products. For example, we have reduced sugar also in some soups, sauces and ketchups.

Our progress towards delivering these commitments is published annually and can be found at <https://www.unilever.com/planet-and-society/positive-nutrition/>.



### **What more will we do**

With our Unilever Sustainable Living Plan coming to a close, we launched in November 2020 the Future Foods initiative, where we committed to reduce sugar and calories in our portfolio even further, e.g.

- We have set sugar and calories targets for our packaged ice cream portfolio, i.e. 95% to contain no more than 22g total sugar per serving\*\* and 95% to contain no more than 250 kcal per serving\*\*, by 2025.
- All children's ice creams\* will contain maximum 110 kcal, 3 g saturated fat and 12 g total sugar per serving\*\* by end 2020.
- In addition, 80% of our global Beverage\*\*\* portfolio will contain no more than 5 g per 100 ml of total sugar, by 2025.
- Finally, we committed to double the number of products that deliver positive nutrition by 2025, defined as products containing impactful amounts of vegetables, fruits, proteins, fibre, unsaturated fatty acids or micronutrients such as vitamins, zinc, iron and iodine

See <https://www.unilever.com/brands/foods-and-refreshment/food-system-changes.html>

\*Our children's ice cream portfolio encompasses the Max, Paddle Pop and Popsicle brands as well as some desserts created for children.

\*\* Serving is defined as: pre-packed single-serve ice cream products meant to be consumed in one-go or 100 ml when sold in packaging aimed at multi consumption moments such as tubs.

\*\*\* Included are all tea and herbals-based beverages. Excluded are unsweetened leaf tea and herbals, and local jewels.

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