

Monday 18 February, 2013

Subject: fyi: Canberra toughens dietary advice against added sugar, shreds credibility of pro-sugar University of Sydney

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1. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) - Australia's main health advisor - today published its once-a-decade update of the *Australian Dietary*

Guidelines: http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55_australian_dietary_guidelines.pdf (Today's Final update replaces the previous

Draft: http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/public_consultation/n55_draft_australian_dietary_guidelines_consultation_111212.pdf) [The 2003 Guidelines are here: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/n33.pdf]

2. The NHMRC's new *Guidelines* feature a toughening of official advice against added sugar, encouraging Australians for the first time to "limit" our consumption of added sugar, in the same way we long have been encouraged to "limit" our consumption of alcohol. Happily, the NHMRC's earlier Draft advice has survived strong opposition from various pro-sugar forces, so official dietary advice on sugar and alcohol consumption becomes: "Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added sugars such as confectionary [sic], sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy and sports drinks"; and "If you choose to drink alcohol, limit intake". Canberra's dietary advice now is that added sugar should be avoided in the same way we should avoid alcohol. [Added post-email: By contrast, the 2003 advice on sugar was: "Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars". Also, note that the NHMRC's new, tougher advice against added sugar translates pretty well 100% into new, tougher nutrition advice against added fructose, the "sweet poison" half of added sugar (which happens to be super-low-GI=19, as discussed in #12 below.]

3. Stronger evidence for "The association between the consumption of sugar sweetened drinks and the risk of excessive weight gain in both children and adults" was the key driver of this new tougher official advice against added sugar. Canberra's concern about "excessive weight gain" reflects the fact that being overweight/obese tends to boost one's risk of diabetes and heart disease, not to mention various other maladies including cancer. For completeness, please note that NHMRC's review of the scientific record also found stronger evidence for the health benefits of breastfeeding, and for the increased consumption of milk,

fruit, non-starchy vegetables and wholegrain cereals. Yes, the "evidence base" seems to hint strongly "don't eat manufactured foods". (Those December 2010 findings until recently had been summarised at the bottom of <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/page/about-guidelines>). [Also added post-email. According to the NHMRC, "Specifically, the evidence base has strengthened for:

x The association between the consumption of fruit and decreased risk of heart disease

x The association between the consumption of non-starchy vegetables and decreased risk of some cancers

x The association between the consumption of wholegrain cereals and decreased risk of heart disease and excessive weight gain

x The association between the consumption of milk and decreased risk of heart disease and some cancers

x The association between the consumption of sugar sweetened drinks and the risk of excessive weight gain in both children and adults

x The health benefits of breastfeeding"

(From the top of p. 2 at

http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/adg_media_briefing.pdf)

These findings now are reflected in the 2013 Guidelines. Looking at the list above, note that added sugar is the only foodstuff for which there is new stronger evidence of a need for reduced consumption. Again, a striking feature of the new Guidelines is the toughening of official advice against added sugar, encouraging Australians for the first time to "limit" our consumption of added sugar, in the same way we long have been encouraged to "limit" our consumption of alcohol.]

4. Now, I think we can agree that sugary softdrinks are a particular health hazard because of the added sugar, not the added water or the added bubbles. The evidence for that is very

strong: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17Sugar-](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17Sugar-t.html?pagewanted=all)

[t.html?pagewanted=all](http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/22/in-fight-against-obesity-drink-sizes-matter/) ; [http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/22/in-fight-against-obesity-drink-sizes-](http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/22/in-fight-against-obesity-drink-sizes-matter/)
[matter/](http://www.australianparadox.com/part-2) ; and <http://www.australianparadox.com/part-2> .

5. Importantly, sugary softdrinks are the largest subset of sugar consumption in Australia and globally; in terms of identifying damage to health, obviously it has been easier for researchers to document damage caused by the *largest subset* than the damage caused *any one of the many smaller subsets*. For example, the evidence that (say) sugary BBQ sauce is a particular problem is not strong! As a matter of logic, however, once one accepts that added sugar is a problem in sugary softdrinks, then it is the aggregate intake of (all) added sugar that matters. Accordingly, the Draft official advice was "Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added sugars". Again, the problem is aggregate consumption: the added sugar in sugary drinks, plus the added sugar in sugary breakfast cereals, plus the added sugar in sugary confectionery, plus the added sugar in sugary bakery items, plus the added sugar in sugary yoghurts, plus the added sugar in other sugary manufactured/processed foods - not just the sugar in sugary softdrinks, as some still like to pretend. And once one accepts that the added sugar in softdrinks is a serious health hazard, it is hard to argue that sugary breakfast cereals - 30% sugar! - are deserving of a "Heart healthy" Tick from the Heart Foundation.

6. Extraordinarily, the University of Sydney's highest-profile nutritionists campaigned against Canberra's toughening of official dietary advice against added sugar. In particular, this July 2011 article -

[http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/a-spoonful-of-sugar-is-not-so-bad/story-e6frg8y6-](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/a-spoonful-of-sugar-is-not-so-bad/story-e6frg8y6-1226090126776)
[1226090126776](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/a-spoonful-of-sugar-is-not-so-bad/story-e6frg8y6-1226090126776) - raised more than a few eyebrows, including mine. Back in July 2011, it was hard to

understand why university nutritionists would go out of their way to defend added sugar, given the increasingly clear evidence that added sugar is a disaster for public health.

7. Awkwardly, Canberra's toughening of dietary advice against added sugar today is a serious blow to the scientific credibility of the pro-sugar University of Sydney. Awkwardly, it's also a blow to the University of Sydney's business interests; yes, it turns out that the Group of Eight University that campaigns to help the general public understand that added sugar in modern doses is harmless also is the Group of Eight University with the deepest links to the sugar and sugary food industries (see #11 below).

8. Not only was the University of Sydney utterly wrong on added sugar in modern doses being harmless, but its "shonky sugar study" - "The Australian Paradox" paper, which formally exonerated added sugar as a key driver of obesity - was used as an intellectual spearhead by the sugar and sugary food industries to attack the NHMRC's tougher (Draft) advice against added sugar (<http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html>).

9. To recap, the so-called *Australian Paradox* is the University of Sydney's "peer reviewed" and published - but obviously false, and disingenuously defended (see #14. below) - scientific "finding" of a "consistent and substantial decline" in the consumption of added sugar in Australia between 1980 and 2010, as obesity ballooned; in short, "Australians have been eating less and less sugar, and rates of obesity have been increasing". Ironically, the lead author reportedly thinks that the NHMRC's tougher stance on added sugar is based on "myth" not scientific evidence. Indeed, sugar is not a problem: here, check out my "peer reviewed" scientific "finding", in a paper that I co-authored and published while operating as "Guest Editor" of the obscure pay-as-you-publish E-journal, *Nutrients* (http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/special_issues/carbohydrates).

10. My year-long dispute with the University of Sydney began when I "solved" the *Australian Paradox*. Not that it was hard: the so-called "paradox" fell over at the slightest scrutiny of the basic facts. It turns out that the overconfident University of Sydney scientists were unaware that the key ABS sugar series on which their obviously false "finding" is based had been discontinued as unreliable by the ABS after 1998-99, over a decade before their obviously faulty paper was (self) published. Moreover, the University of Sydney's unreliable authors somehow failed to notice that their four - four! - valid measures of per-capita sugar consumption - in their own published charts - trended up not down. Importantly, my dispute with the University of Sydney at its core is not about science and it's not about nutrition - it's about simple things like up versus down, valid versus invalid datasets and the need to correct serious errors in the public debate (Slides 13-17 in <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/22Slideshowaustraliangoestoparadoxcanberrafinal.pdf> and <http://www.smh.com.au/business/economist-v-nutritionists-big-sugar-and-lowgi-brigade-lose-20120307-1uj6u.html>).

11. Interestingly, the University of Sydney and its unreliable authors - who falsely exonerated added sugar as a key driver of obesity while wearing their "scientist" hats - operate an apparently prosperous business that stamps "low GI" sugar and other sugary products as Healthy (pp. 10-11 at <http://www.gisymbol.com/cmsAdmin/uploads/Glycemic-Index-Foundation-Healthy-Choices-Brochure.pdf>). In the Queensland of my youth, infamous "Minister for Everything" Russ Hinze might have joked: "That's not a conflict of interest, that's a convergence of interest!" (apologies to Max Gillies).

12. It turns out that the University of Sydney has spent the best part of half a century trying to identify "good" carbohydrates and "bad" carbohydrates, yet somehow failed to identify the one profoundly unhealthy carbohydrate - added fructose, the "sweet poison" half of added sugar (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17Sugar-t.html?pagewanted=all>). The fructose half of added sugar has a super-low GI of 19, although that is not something the University of Sydney highlights as it seeks to convince the general public that added sugar is harmless in modern doses. [Background: The (chosen) Glycemic Index (GI) "break even" between "good" and "bad" foods is 55. Check out the yummy low GIs of sugary "Coca Cola", "Milo", "Snickers Bar", "Ice Cream" and "Cake" in a search at <http://www.glycemicindex.com/foodSearch.php> . Read about the underpinnings of the University of Sydney's pro-sugar low-GI enterprise at <http://www.glycemicindex.com/> . The University of Sydney's serious undisclosed conflict of interest with its low-GI enterprise - making it hard to know when its scientists are wearing their "scientist" hats and when they are wearing their "business" hats - is discussed at p.3 of <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/Sept2012-Conversations.pdf>]

[Another later addition: Interestingly, the NHMRC went out of its way to take an axe to the credibility of the University of Sydney's low-GI diet as a useful intervention to prevent/minimise obesity:

Glycaemic index: The US review found strong and consistent evidence that glycaemic index and/or glycaemic load are not associated with body weight and that modifying either of these does not lead to greater weight loss or better weight management. (footnote 198; http://www.nutritionevidencelibrary.com/evidence.cfm?evidence_summary_id=250378) There is considerable variability in these indices, depending on inter-and intra-individual factors and the form of food (including the degree of processing, stage of ripeness, cooking and cooling times), which may limit practical application.(footnote 199) These factors were not included in the literature review to inform the revision of these Guidelines". (p. 20 of Australian Dietary Guidelines)]

13. Importantly, widely trusted nutritionist Dr Rosemary Stanton has confirmed the case that the University of Sydney's faulty *Australian Paradox* paper is an academic disgrace: "And yes, I agree with you [Rory] that we have no evidence that sugar consumption in Australia has fallen [so the conclusion of a "consistent and substantial decline" is hopelessly wrong]. A walk around any supermarket shows that huge numbers of foods contain sugar. I argue this point frequently with colleagues"; "I have many objections to that particular paper and to the idea that sugar is not a problem"; and "I have expressed my opinion about the paper to the authors [Dr Alan Barclay and Professor Jennie Brand Miller]... I will almost certainly cite it at some stage as an example of something I consider to be incorrect" (Slides 6 and 18 in <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/22Slideshowaustraliangoestoparadoxcanberrafinal.pdf>).

14. The authors' unreasonably determined defence of the faulty *Australian Paradox* paper has morphed from clownish into something more serious and "unsettling". After I kicked up a stink early in 2012, the University of Sydney's food-industry service providers defended their faulty paper by noting that I am "not a nutritionist" (correct) but then claiming that cars not humans had been consuming a big chunk of the available sugar via ethanol production. Oops, wrong again. These are professional scientists? (<http://www.smh.com.au/business/pesky-economist-wont-let-big-sugar-lie-20120725-22pru.html>) More recently, amusingly, the local sugar industry attempted to rescue the University of Sydney's unreliable nutritionists - the industry's business associates in the low-GI enterprise - but the attempted rescue "crashed and burned". That is, the University of Sydney now claims "a new independent review of Australian's [sic] sugar consumption indicates that it is still continuing to decline". In fact, the sugar-industry-commissioned-funded-and-"framed" Green Pool sugar series clearly suggests that sugar consumption has been flat/up over the past quarter-century, flatly contradicting the key "finding" of the "shonky sugar study": <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/JBM-AWB-AustralianParadox.pdf>

15. Against that background above, I am arguing near and far for the correction or retraction of the *Australian Paradox* paper by the University of Sydney and/or the pay-as-you-publish Ejournal Nutrients (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/TimeforNeweditor24052012.pdf>). I am asking: whatever happened to quality control and scientific integrity at the University of Sydney, and I am asking: when exactly does a determined misrepresentation of the facts in the defence of a false scientific "finding" published in an obscure pay-as-you-publish E-journal morph from being an academic disgrace to being simple scientific fraud? In my opinion, it is not good enough [given the series of obvious errors in the paper] for Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence simply to claim that "On the advice available to me the report of Professor Brand-Miller's research which appears in Nutrients was independently and objectively peer-reviewed prior to its publication in that reputable journal" (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/SydneyUniVC%20LETTER070612.pdf>). It simply is not good enough for his Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research, Professor Jill Trehwella to claim with a straight face that quality control in this matter involved "internationally accepted standard practice", when she knows that the influential lead author – who loved the paper – and the "Guest Editor" – who oversaw publication in an obscure but supposedly "peer reviewed" pay-as you-publish E-journal – are the same person (<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/Sept2012-Conversations.pdf>). Yes, that does sound very cosy. Now whenever I hear the words "standard practice" used to describe anything regarding the University of Sydney, I think of Dr Evil's childhood – described as "pretty standard really" – in the movie "Austin Powers". (It's here on youtube, starting from 32 seconds to 1.24 minutes at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITJj4wbmAhk> . Caution: some bad language is used.)

16. Journalists and members of the public might choose to be very cautious about accepting strange scientific "findings" and/or nutrition advice from any University with deep links to the sugar industry. In the US, "Big Sugar" set out in the 1950s to scramble and mislead science on the links between modern sugar consumption and chronic diseases; along the way, Harvard University in the 1960s and 1970s became America's "most public defender" of "modern sugar consumption" as harmless, its "science" apparently corrupted by heavy funding from the sugar and sugary food industries (<http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2012/10/sugar-industry-lies-campaign>). In Australia, the University of Sydney is home to our highest-profile academic defenders of added sugar in food as harmless. The NHMRC confirmed again today that the scientific evidence contradicts that story. For further information, try www.australianparadox.com .

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economist and former-fattie

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Media reports on the NHMRC's new tougher official advice against sugar include:

- <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-19/sugar-re-think-an-evidence-based-decision/4527312?section=business>
- <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-19/new-diet-guidelines-spark-debate-on-sugar/4526174>
- <http://www.smh.com.au/national/food-guide-gets-tough-on-sugary-drinks-salt-and-fats-20130218-2enjz.html>]