

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**The SACN Report on Carbohydrates and Health
– Fibre is Back on the Table**

Today, Friday 17th July, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) has published the final version of its “Carbohydrates and Health” report. Leatherhead Food Research recognises the significance of the SACN report and its recommendations and the potential health benefits that it may bring for a large proportion of the UK population.

The report presents several challenges. Firstly, from a public health perspective the guidelines must be clear and understandable for consumers such that they recognise what action they can take. This means that definitions and terminology will need to be understood and that on-pack communication should be aligned. Secondly, the recommendations present the food industry with further reformulation challenges alongside innovation and new product opportunities.

“The SACN report recommendations are part of a bigger picture to improve public health, no one aspect of the diet, be it free sugars or fibre can make a significant difference alone. The findings of the report will be a challenge for both consumers and industry alike.” *Jenny Arthur as Director of Nutrition & Innovation.*

What is happening with sugars?

- The SACN report has removed the previous term ‘Non milk extrinsic sugars’ and replaced it with the term free sugars. These are sugars added to foods by manufacturers, cooks or consumers, plus sugar naturally found in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juice. The definition of free sugars excludes milk sugars, naturally found in milk and sugars contained in cell walls, for example in whole fruit.
- The report recommends that free sugars should make up 5% of dietary energy intake for those over 2 years of age. This is half the current recommended intake. This equates to a reduction from 200 kcal (12.5 teaspoons or 50g) to 100 kcal (6.25 teaspoons or 25g) of total energy intake from free sugars, based on daily reference intake 2,000 kcal for an average woman.
- The report gives advice for adults and children to drink fewer sugar-sweetened beverages.

What are consumers expected to do with the SACN information?

The recommended reduction of free sugars represents a significant challenge for consumers if they are to meet these recommendations. 5% of total energy equates to approximately 30g of free sugars per day for a man and 25g per day for a woman.

However the challenge of communicating the right messages to consumers is made more difficult by the way in which sugars are communicated on pack. Figures shown on-pack represent the total sugar content in each product, without identifying the amount of free sugars.

This makes it hard for consumers to calculate their total intake of free sugars across a range of products, even if it is assumed that the definitions are understood. What is clear however,

is that the 25g recommendation per day will require much closer scrutiny by consumers of the products they choose to eat.

What is the current labelling legislation?

Currently in the UK and EU, back of pack nutrition labelling is voluntary for most pre-packed foods with a few exceptions; including when a food is fortified with vitamins, or when a nutrition claim is made. However this will change in December 2016, when back of pack nutrition labelling becomes mandatory for most pre-packed foods.

In our view the SACN report is likely to increase pressure on businesses to use voluntary front of pack nutrition labelling, which includes the traffic light labelling system in the UK. However, this voluntary system currently uses 'total sugars' as the criteria (which is set by the accompanying EU regulation, 1169/2011) rather than 'free sugars'.

Changes to EU and associated UK labelling legislation as a result of this report are unlikely, at least in the short term, as changes would need to be agreed in Brussels by all EU member states. Best practice guidance however, could be updated more easily.

What are some of the challenges faced by the industry when reformulating products to reduce sugar levels?

The challenge in reducing total sugar levels is that sugars added to products not only provide sweetness, but also bulk and other important functional properties, including a preservative function in many products.

The replacement of sugar with alternatives has to be carried out in an intelligent manner with a good understanding of the impact on product structure, sensory quality and shelf life. Advances in sugar replacers continue and provide industry with different options for sugar replacement.

How do consumers perceive reformulated products?

Recent consumer research conducted at Leatherhead using its database of over 10,000 consumers, has shown that in the case of sugar replacement, the sweetness perception can be affected in two ways: overall sweetness perceived and length of the perception. This offers critical insights into how the sweetness of a product is perceived during its consumption and at which point discrepancies are more pronounced between the original and an adapted formulation.

What is happening with dietary fibre?

The SACN report's recommendation to increase fibre intakes is a significant move that will be equally challenging for consumers. The report makes the following recommendations:

- Dietary fibre is to be chemically determined using the Association of Official Analytical Chemists method (AOAC) 2009.01. Previously the Englyst (NSP) method has been used.
- Recommended intake of dietary fibre has been increased to 30g/day (AOAC) for adults from 23g/day (AOAC) an increase of 7g of fibre. This is equivalent to 2 slices of thick wholemeal bread.
- For children 2 to 5 years the SACN recommendation is 15g/day, for children 5 to 10 years 20g/day, for children 11 to 16 years 25g/day and for children 16 to 18 years 30g/day.

What does 30g/day of fibre look like in foods?

The size of this challenge becomes clear when looking at the consumption required to reach it. In order to reach this goal each and every day, it would be necessary to consume around three to five servings of fibrous vegetables (for example peas, broccoli and carrots), two to four servings of fruit (for example an apple with skin, a portion of strawberries and an orange) plus three servings of wholegrain bread/pasta/beans/pulses (for example, two slices of wholemeal bread, lentils and wholemeal spaghetti).

What does the SACN report mean for the Food Industry?

The recommendations that SACN were likely to make have been known for some time, yet the challenges that will be faced by consumers and by industry are more apparent than ever. The SACN recommendations are just one part of a complex and multi-dimensional public health matrix and whilst the clarity of the recommendations for intakes of free sugars and fibre will be welcomed in some quarters, it has also made it clear that there is significant work to do before consumers can be expected to act on the information.

The role that the food industry can play in reformulating and innovating will be a part of the solution but there will need to be more collective focus on the following points.

- Helping consumers to understand the distinction between free sugars and total sugars.
- Recognition that on-pack communication on sugars in the EU is not currently aligned with the SACN recommendation and that a regulated solution will take time to resolve.
- Support and encouragement for consumers to move directionally towards a diet that is higher in fibre.
- Continued innovation within existing products and via new products to help consumers meet the recommendations of the report.

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About Leatherhead Food Research

Leatherhead Food Research provides expertise and support to the global food and drink sector with practical solutions that cover all stages of a product's life cycle from consumer insight, ingredient innovation and sensory testing to food safety consultancy and global regulatory advice.

As a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation with 1,500 members, Leatherhead represents a who's who of the global food and drink industry and supports all Members and clients, large or small with consultancy and advice as well as training, market news, published reports and bespoke projects. Projects are tailored to meet the specific needs of individual Members and clients in support of their competitive goals and technical challenges.

Alongside the Member support and project work, our world-renowned experts deliver cutting-edge research in areas that drive long term commercial benefit for the food and drink industry.

These projects can be run in collaboration with other scientific or academic institutions or within the public sector. We run regular training courses for Members and Non-members on topics of interest and relevance to the food and drink industry and issue publications, white papers and newsletters.

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