

We need to end our addiction to sugar

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I have published this video this morning. In it, I argue that sugar is a substance as addictive as tobacco and alcohol and may be much more dangerous now, given the scale of obesity and type 2 diabetes now evident in the UK. The biggest improvement to healthcare and well-being in the UK that Labour could deliver would result from them helping us break our addiction to sugar. So, isn't it time they did just that?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIHFdpl-87I>

The audio version of this video is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=4hum2-167a919-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=60a0c8&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=fb0584

The transcript is:

I'm talking about the things that Labour could do that have very little cost that could have a massive impact upon society. There's been a whole list of them, and this is another one. And it's enormously important.

Our modern society is incredibly good at creating addictions. We all know that. Tobacco is one obvious example - a substance created solely to ensure that people get addicted to it so that others make profit.

Alcohol falls pretty much into the same category for many people, and a lot of people are addicted to it.

And people are also addicted to sugar, or fructose in particular, which is a particular form of sugar, the other being glucose, which is not nearly so harmful. And fructose is remarkably close to alcohol in its chemical construction.

Sugar is intensely dangerous. We know that. We know that people are obese. We know that obesity is rising. We know that there has been a massive increase in ultra-processed food. We know as a consequence that we have vastly more people suffering from diabetes type 2 than we have ever had before as a result.

We're also seeing record numbers of people with dementia, and some doctors are now calling dementia type 3 diabetes. And it has the same root cause, they believe, and that is a failure to control sugar within the body.

And this failure is unsurprising. There are vast amounts of sugar in many of the products that we consume.

I checked a Magnum ice cream recently, something that I, well, used to quite enjoy, if I'm completely honest, and discovered, to my horror, that there are six teaspoonfuls of sugar in a single Magnum ice cream. Now that's massive. It is decades since I put sugar in my tea; perhaps even longer since I put it on cereals, which I can remember my mother encouraging. It was a truly staggering revelation to me, therefore, to discover just how much sugar there might be in such a relatively innocuous product. And if you do the same, you'll find it in vast quantities of other products, commercially packaged.

Now I'm not saying we should do without sugar, that would be absurd. I can think of plenty of good reasons why we do need some sugar. Try making a curry without a teaspoon of sugar in there, and you will not get the result that you enjoy, for example. So, of course, it has a role in life. I'm not talking about banning it.

But we do need to control it. And in particular, we need to control people's addiction to it, which is causing all these massively detrimental health effects.

How can we do that? Well, the best way is by communicating the scale of the problem. And I can't think of a better solution than by changing the packaging of products.

We've done it with cigarettes.

We've done it with alcohol.

Cigarettes have massive health warnings on them.

Alcohol in all its forms has labelling about drink awareness, and drink responsibly, and so on.

But we don't have 'eat responsibly' messages on the packaging of most foodstuffs, or perhaps we should.

And what I think we should have is a little label that shows a teaspoon and how many teaspoons of sugar there are in an average portion of that product at the time that it reaches your mouth. Not at the time it departs the factory, or when you buy it, but actually by the time you are likely to eat it. And that will tell you whether you are consuming too much sugar or not.

You will be able to tot up how much sugar you eat a day, and keep it under control. And the benefits will be enormous.

We would have fewer sick people; we'd have fewer obese people.

We would also have people who are a lot less depressed because there's a relationship between fructose and depression.

We would have people who are able to move more and who are, therefore, fitter.

We would have a more productive society.

And that would increase our GDP, which is one of our government's great goals, which is why I'm surprised they aren't talking about this.

And, of course, we could massively cut the cost of the NHS because it has to pick up the pieces. that big sugar goes out of its way to create. And by pieces, I mean those people who suffer as a consequence of this addiction.

Come on Labour, you could improve our diets. You did it once with salt, now do it with sugar. Make sure that we can control the use of this substance which is so harmful, and let's get on top of it and literally make ourselves better. It's within your possibility to deliver that, so please do.