

News story: Overwhelming public support for sugar and calorie reduction

A new survey from Public Health England (PHE) shows overwhelming public support for reducing sugar and calories in everyday foods.

The survey, carried out by Ipsos MORI, found around 9 in 10 people support the government working with the food industry (manufacturers, supermarkets and the eating out of home sector) to make everyday foods and drinks healthier. Helping the NHS was named as one of the main reasons for people supporting this work.

This applied to all sectors, and no concessions were made for food consumed in restaurants, coffee shops or cafes, despite this often being labelled as a 'treat'.

These figures come as Duncan Selbie, chief executive of Public Health England, tells the food industry that next year PHE will highlight where progress has not been made on sugar reduction and that this may result in further action from the government.

Speaking at today's, Tuesday 20 November 2018, [Food Matters Live](#) event in London, he will call on every sector of the food industry, in particular out of home outlets, to step up and accelerate its efforts.

The survey explored the public's perception of obesity, and PHE's reduction programmes that have challenged the food industry to reduce sugar and calories by 20% in everyday foods such as breakfast cereals, yoghurts and pizzas, as well as ready meals.

Other notable findings from the survey include:

- over 9 in 10 respondents think obesity is a problem in the UK, and 79% believe it has a negative impact on the NHS
- only cancer (47% of respondents) and mental health (43%) are seen as bigger health concerns for the UK population than obesity (39%)
- people believe the greatest responsibility for tackling obesity lies with individuals and families (90%), the food industry (80%) and the government (72%), underlining a belief in a collective responsibility
- there was support from 87% of people to replace unhealthy products near supermarket tills and checkouts, with healthier ones

Duncan Selbie, chief executive at PHE, said:

Obesity is the pandemic of modern times. Customers are saying they want faster progress from the food industry, and in particular, those businesses that have taken little or no action. We will be publicly reporting on these during 2019.

Dr Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist at PHE, said:

Severe obesity in ten-to-eleven year-olds is at an all-time high. Plans to improve the nation's diet are often described as 'nanny state' interference, but it's clear people want healthier food and they expect the industry to play their full part in this.

The survey also shows people expect the government to tackle obesity, with 60% believing it could do more. However, the survey was undertaken before the government published chapter 2 of its [Childhood Obesity Plan](#).

In May 2018, PHE reported on progress against the first year sugar reduction ambition of 5%. This showed an overall 2% reduction in foods contributing the most sugar to children's diets, with up to 6% reduced in some product categories.

Next year, PHE will publish further progress towards reaching the 20% sugar reduction ambition by 2020, as well as guidelines for industry to achieve the 20% reduction in calories by 2024.