

Health professionals' understanding of added sugars consumption in relation to key nutrition issues in Canada

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Introduction

- While sugars are widely misperceived as a unique factor contributing to weight gain, findings from systematic reviews and meta-analyses consistently demonstrate that sugars are no more likely to contribute to weight gain than other energy sources.
- Media articles often report that added sugars consumption in Canada is increasing and that it is contributing to rising obesity rates.
- However, Statistics Canada data indicate that consumption of sugar (sucrose) has been declining over the past 4 decades.
- Consumption of total added sugars is estimated to be approximately 11% of energy intake and modestly declining as a percentage of total calories.

Purpose

Generally speaking, the public and the media largely rely on health professionals for accurate sugar-related scientific information. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess health professionals' perceptions regarding Canadian added sugars consumption patterns, and their degree of agreement towards certain statements on sugars and health.

Methods

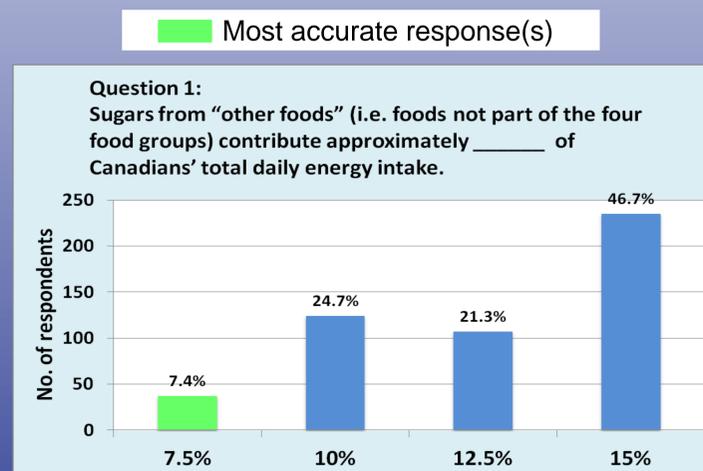
- A total of 511 health professionals, primarily dietitians, voluntarily completed questionnaires at two national conferences and one regional conference in 2013.
- Questionnaires were composed of five questions on topics pertaining to dietary sources of sugars, basic sugar metabolism in humans and the association between sugar consumption and health.

References: ¹Langlois K *et al.* Sugar consumption among Canadians of all ages. *Stat Can. Health Rep.* 2011;22. ²Schorin M *et al.* The Science of Sugars, Part I. *Nutrition Today.* 2012;47:96-101. ³Sadler MJ *et al.* *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr.* 2013 Jul. ⁴Sievenpiper JL *et al.* *Ann Intern Med.* 2012;156:291-304. ⁵Te Morenga L *et al.* *BMJ.* 2013;346:e7492. ⁶Langlois K *et al.* Diet composition and obesity among Canadian Adults. ⁷Cansim database, Table 104-0007 (1994./96/98); Table 105-0503 (2000-2012).

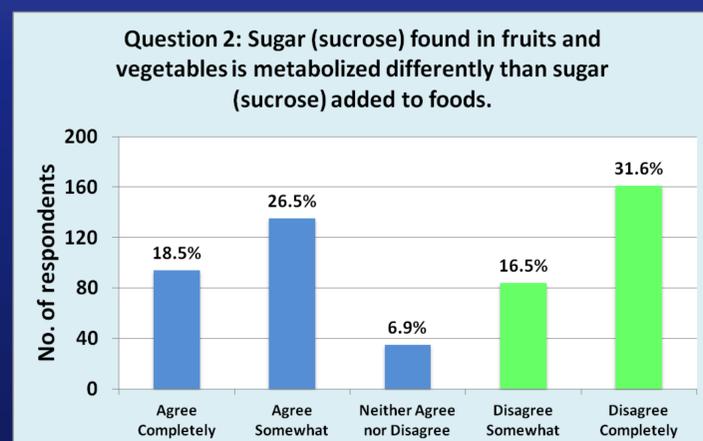


The Nutrition Information Service is managed by qualified nutrition professionals including registered dietitians and nutrition researchers and is guided by a Scientific Advisory Council.

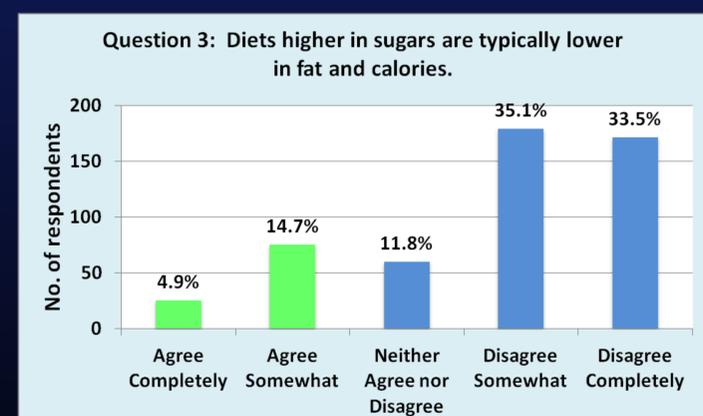
Results



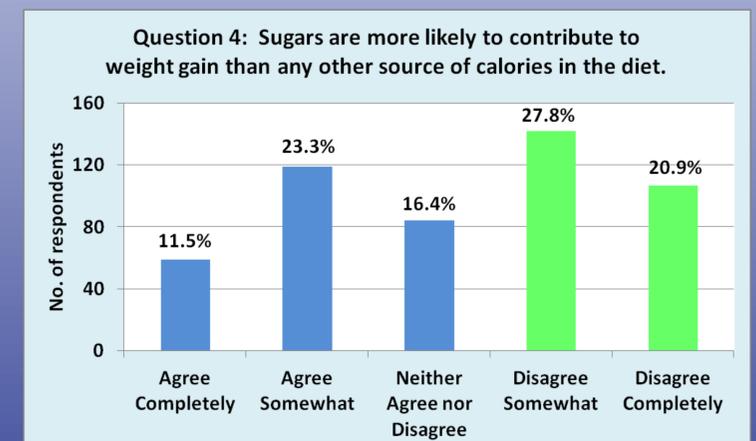
- Only 7.4% of respondents were aware that sugars from "other foods" contribute approximately 7.5% of Canadians' total daily energy intake, with most sugars coming from the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide¹.



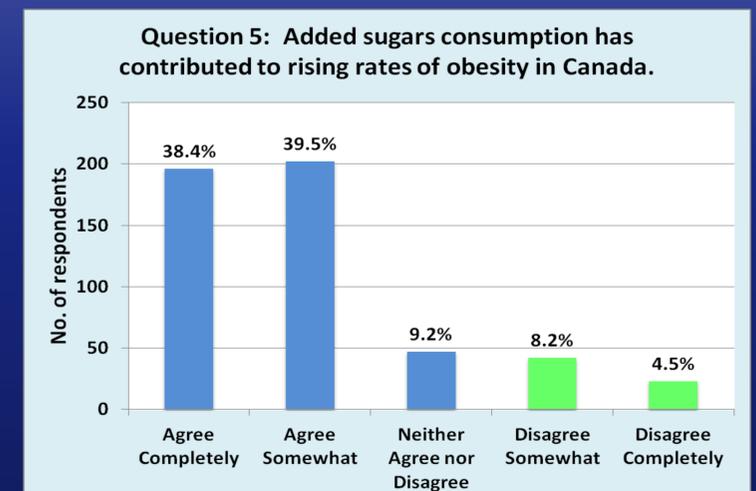
- Less than half (48%) of respondents held the correct perception that the sugar (sucrose) found in fruits and vegetables is metabolized the same as sucrose added to foods².



- About 80% of respondents did not know diets higher in sugars are typically lower in fat and calories (i.e. the "sugar-fat seesaw")³.



- Less than half of respondents correctly agreed that sugars are no more likely to contribute to weight gain than other energy sources in the diet^{4,5}.



- Very few (13%) disagreed that added sugars consumption has contributed to increasing rates of obesity in Canada. Added sugars contribute to total energy intake; however, scientific evidence has not found a specific link between total or added sugars and obesity. In fact, Statistics Canada analysis of data from the Canadian Community Health Survey⁶ found that higher total energy intake significantly increased the odds of obesity among adults but the relative percentages of carbohydrates, protein and fats was generally not a factor. In addition, it is worth noting that the intake of added sugars has been modestly declining in Canada while the prevalence of obesity continues to rise⁷.

Conclusions

This qualitative survey among health professionals revealed certain discrepancies between the evidence and health professionals' understanding of certain sugars-related scientific information.