

July 13, 2005

Secretary Michael Leavitt
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

The undersigned scientists, health professionals, and organizations are deeply concerned about the impact of non-diet soft drinks, both carbonated and non-carbonated, on Americans' diet and health. Americans consume more than three times as much non-diet soda pop per capita as they did 50 years ago. Once marketed in 6.5-ounce containers, today carbonated soft drinks are marketed in 20-ounce and even larger single-serving containers. Once consumed as occasional treats, soft drinks are now the single biggest source of calories in the average American's diet. In 1999–2002, carbonated soft drinks and non-carbonated (fruit) drinks provided about 13 percent of the average teenager's calories.

Soft drinks may replace more nutritious foods in people's diets or add excess calories. U.S. Department of Agriculture food-consumption surveys have found that many teenagers, among others, do not consume recommended amounts of healthful foods (for example, fruits and vegetables) and nutrients (for example, calcium, magnesium, and vitamin A). Soft drinks clearly are replacing milk in many Americans' diets. In the 1970s, teenagers were consuming twice as much milk as soda pop. In the 1990s that ratio was reversed. In 1999–2002, teens drank three times as much soft drinks (carbonated and noncarbonated) as milk. The replacement of milk in the diet could portend higher rates of osteoporosis in the coming decades.

Between 1976–80 and 1999–2002, the percentage of children who were overweight doubled (6- to 11-year-olds) or tripled (12- to 19-year olds). Several recent studies indicate that increasing soft-drink consumption is probably one (of numerous) contributors to weight gain in children and adults. Considering how much soda pop children drink, one might think that they are addicted to it. And well they might be, because six of the seven most popular soft drinks contain caffeine, a mildly addictive stimulant drug. In addition, non-diet soft drinks promote dental caries, and the acids in soft drinks promote dental erosion.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer-health organization, is petitioning your department, through the Food and Drug Administration, to require health messages on the labels of soft drinks. The notices would alert consumers to risks that frequent consumption of non-diet soft drinks poses, such as weight gain (and obesity-related health problems: diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, heart disease, and cancer), caries, and osteoporosis.

We urge you to review CSPI's petition carefully and require the new labeling that it seeks. Inasmuch as that action alone would not solve the problem of over-consumption of soft drinks, we also urge the Department of Health and Human Services to fund major mass-media campaigns to reduce soft-drink consumption, as well as to promote better overall nutrition.

Sincerely,

Individuals

Myron Allukian Jr., DDS MPH
Past President
American Public Health Association
Boston, MA

Caroline M. Apovian, M.D., FACN
Associate Professor of Medicine
Boston University School of Medicine
Director, Nutrition & Weight Mgmt. Center
Boston Medical Center
Boston, MA

Henry Blackburn, MD
Division of Epidemiology
School of Public Health
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

Gladys Block, PhD
Professor of Epidemiology
Director, Public Health Nutrition Program
University of California, Berkeley, School of
Public Health
Berkeley, CA

George Bray, MD, Boyd Professor
Chief, Division of Clinical Obesity
and Metabolism
Professor, Pennington Biological Research
Center
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA

Brian A. Burt
Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Univ. of Michigan School of Public Health
Ann Arbor, MI

Carlos Camargo, MD, DrPH
Associate Professor
Department of Epidemiology
Harvard School of Public Health
Boston, MA

Richard J. Deckelbaum, MD, Director
Institute of Human Nutrition
Professor of Pediatrics
Columbia University

New York, NY
Hans Diehl, DrHSc, MPH,
Director Lifestyle Medicine Institute
Loma Linda, CA

Brenda Eskenazi, Ph.D.,
Professor of Epidemiology and Maternal &
Child Health
Director, UC Berkeley Center for Children's
Environmental Health Research
University of California, Berkeley

Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., MD
Preventive Cardiology Consultant
Department of General Surgery
Cleveland Clinic Foundation
Cleveland, OH

Jared I. Fine, DDS, MPH
Dental Health Administrator
Office of Dental Health /Community Health
Services Division
Alameda County Public Health Dept.
Oakland, CA

Mary Jane Getlinger, Coordinator
Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network
UW-Madison Nutritional Sciences
Madison, WI

Lawrence W. Green, DrPH, Adjunct Prof.
Dept. of Epidemiology and Biostatistics
Director, Social and Behavioral Sciences
Program
Comprehensive Cancer Center
University of California at San Francisco
San Francisco, CA

Roland Griffiths, PhD
Departments of Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Johns Hopkins Univ. School of Medicine
Baltimore, MD

Melissa Guajardo
Program Director
Nutrition Education and Community Food
Security
Health Education Council
West Sacramento, CA

Suzanne Havala Hobbs, DrPH, MS, RD
Clinical Assistant Professor and Associate
Director, Doctoral Program in Health
Leadership
School of Public Health
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC

John R Hughes, MD
Professor, Department of Psychiatry
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT

Poonam Jain, BDS, MS
Associate Professor, Restorative Dentistry
Southern Illinois University School of
Dental Medicine
Alton, IL

Robert W. Jeffery, PhD
Professor and Interim Division Head
Division of Epidemiology and Community
Health
Director, University of Minnesota Obesity
Prevention Center
Univ. of Minnesota School of Public Health
Minneapolis, MN

David L. Katz, MD, MPH, FACPM, FACP
Director, Yale Prevention Research Center
Yale University School of Medicine
New Haven, CT

Angie Jo Keihner, MS
Research Scientist
Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section
Public Health Institute
Sacramento, CA

JoAnn E. Manson, MD, DrPH
Chief, Division of Preventive Medicine
Brigham and Women's Hospital
Prof. of Medicine, Harvard Medical School
Boston, MA

William J. McCarthy, PhD
Adj. Associate Professor of Public Health
Department of Health Services
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles CA

Marion Nestle, PhD, MPH
Paulette Goddard Professor
Dept. of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public
Health
New York University
New York, NY

Sushma Palmer, PhD, Program Director
Center for Communications, Health and the
Environment (CECHE)
Washington, DC

Susan Pennel
Communications Manager
Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section
California Department of Health Services
Sacramento, CA

Barry M. Popkin, PhD, Director
UNC Interdisciplinary Obesity Program
Professor of Nutrition
School of Public Health
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC

Bill Reger-Nash, EdD
Associate Professor
Department of Community Medicine
West Virginia Univ. School of Medicine
Morgantown, WV

Eric Rimm, ScD
Associate Professor of Epidemiology
and Nutrition
Harvard School of Public Health
Boston, MA

Barbara J. Rolls, PhD
Professor and Guthrie Chair in Nutrition
Department of Nutritional Sciences
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA

Frank M. Sacks, MD
Professor Nutrition Department,
Harvard School of Public Health;
Prof. of Medicine, Brigham & Women's
Hospital
Harvard Medical School
Boston, MA

Jonathan Shenkin, DDS, MPH
Assistant Clinical Professor, Health Policy,
Health Services Research and Pediatric
Dentistry
Boston University
Boston, MA

Karen J. Sherwood, RDH, BS
School Dental Hygienist
School District of Lancaster
Lancaster, PA

Pat Stumme
Extension Regional Center, Mankato
University of Minnesota Extension Service
Mankato, MN

Keri Thompson, RDH,BS
Registered Dental Hygienist
Ronald McDonald CareMobile - South
Dakota
Pierre, SD

Dean G. Tourigny, DDS, PA
Biddeford, ME

Marcella Warner, PhD
Assistant Research Epidemiologist
School of Public Health
University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, CA

Karlys Wells, Team Nutrition
Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
Brookings, SD

Walter Willett, MD
Fredrick John Stare Professor of
Epidemiology and Nutrition
Departments of Nutrition and Epidemiology
Harvard School of Public Health
Boston, MA

Alison Okada Wollitzer, PhD
Director of Research Administration
Sansum Diabetes Research Institute
Santa Barbara, CA

Grace Wyshak, PhD
Associate Professor in the Departments of
Biostatistics and Population and
International Health
Harvard School of Public Health
Boston, Massachusetts

Lisa Young, PhD, RD
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and
Public Health
New York University
New York, NY

Organizations

American Association of Public Health
Dentistry
American Dental Hygienists Association
American Society of Bariatric Physicians
California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Consumer Federation of America
Institute for America's Health
National Center for Health Education

