



# Behaviours and attitudes toward consumption of sugar in foods and drinks in WA, 2015

## Background

The Nutrition Monitoring Survey Series has been conducted in Western Australia (WA) since 1995 to investigate knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of West Australians relating to food, nutrition and the Australian Dietary Guidelines. The surveys include assessments of dietary change as well as barriers and promoters of dietary change. The most recent survey was conducted in 2015.

The state-wide telephone survey included 1207 participants. One third (33%) of respondents were male and two thirds (67%) were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 64 years, with almost half (45%) residing in the Perth metropolitan area.

Data were weighted for sample design and probability of selection in 2015. Post survey adjustments were made to compensate for under or over representation of gender, age or areas of residence using the 2014 Estimated Resident Population for WA people aged 18 to 64 years.

## Recommended intake of sugars

The Australian Dietary Guidelines<sup>1</sup> recommend that Australians should enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups every day, but to limit foods containing added sugars. These foods ('discretionary choices') are not an essential or necessary part of the diet and should only be consumed occasionally. They include confectionary, sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy and sports drinks.

## Key results

### Perceived major problems with the Australian diet

- While 'too much sugar/sweet things' was cited by 34% of WA adults as a major problem with the Australian diet, only 3% of WA adults identified too many soft drinks/sugary drinks as a problem.

### Health conditions associated with consumption of too much food and drink high in sugar or added sugar

- The health problems people associated with consumption of too much food and drink high in sugar or added sugar were: diabetes (72%); overweight and obesity (59%); heart disease (34%); tooth decay (13%); and high blood pressure (13%). Only 2% of adults said they don't know of any health problems.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government. Eat for Health. Australian Dietary Guidelines. Providing the scientific evidence for healthier Australian diets. National Health and Medical Research Council, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013

## Consumption of soft drinks on the day prior to the survey

### Sugar sweetened drinks

- Overall, 19% of WA adults consumed sugar sweetened drinks on the day prior to the survey.
- Males were more likely to have consumed sugar sweetened drinks than females (30% compared with 7%).
- Younger adults aged 18 to 34 years (29%) were more likely to have consumed sugar sweetened drinks than those aged 45 to 54 years (10%) and 55 to 64 years (9%).
- Among those who drank sugar sweetened drinks on the day prior to the survey, the mean intake was 662mL.

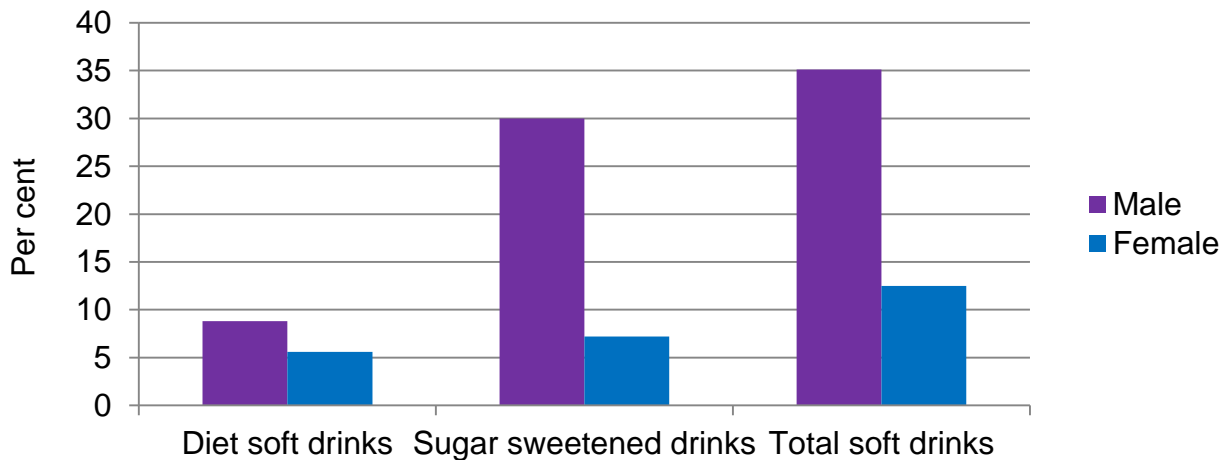
### Diet drinks

- Less than one in ten adults (7%) reported drinking diet drinks on the day prior to the survey.
- Among those who drank diet soft drinks, the mean intake was 544mL.

### Total soft drinks (sugar sweetened and diet)

- One quarter of WA adults (24%) consumed soft drinks on the day prior to the survey.
- Males were more likely to have consumed soft drinks than females (35% compared with 12%).
- Adults aged 18 to 34 years (32%) were more likely to have consumed soft drinks than those aged 55 to 64 years (15%).
- Among those who consumed soft drinks, the mean intake was 682mL.

Figure 1. **Sugar sweetened, diet and total soft drinks consumed on the day prior to the survey, by gender, NMSS 2015**



Note: Percentages for total soft drinks are less than diet soft drinks and sugar sweetened soft drinks combined because some respondents consumed both on the day prior to the survey.

### Intentions to reduce sugary drink consumption

- Three quarters of WA adults (74%) thought they already had a diet low in sugary drinks.
- One in five (13%) were trying to drink fewer sugary drinks and 6% were thinking about cutting down their consumption of sugary drinks.
- Females were more likely than males to state that they already have a diet low in sugary drinks (82% compared with 66%).

- Those aged 18 to 34 years (63%) were less likely than those aged 55 to 64 years (83%) to say they already have a diet low in sugary drinks.
- Those aged 18 to 34 years were more likely than those aged 45 to 54 years to not be thinking about cutting down on sugary drinks (14% compared with 2%).
- When asked how often they tried to avoid sugary drinks, around half (52%) of respondents claimed to 'always' avoid sugary drinks.
- Females were more likely than males to say they always avoid sugary drinks (60% compared with 44%).
- Adults aged 55 to 64 years (68%) were more likely than adults aged 18 to 34 years (41%) and 35 to 44 years (53%) to say they always avoid sugary drinks.
- Adults aged 18 to 34 years (24%) were more likely than all other age groups to say they sometimes try to avoid sugary drinks.

## Consumption of foods high in sugar or added sugar

- Half of WA adults (50%) claimed they already had a diet without a lot of high sugar foods.
- One in five (22%) were currently trying to eat fewer foods high in sugar or added sugar.
- Adults aged 55 to 64 years (64%) were more likely than those aged 18 to 34 years (46%) and 35 to 44 years (46%) to claim they already eat a diet low in sugar and added sugar foods.
- Adults aged 18 to 34 years (23%) were more likely to be thinking about cutting down on foods high in sugar or added sugar than those aged 55 to 64 years (9%).

## Frequency of trying to avoid foods high in sugar or added sugar

- Three in ten WA adults (29%) said they always avoid foods high in sugar or added sugar, while one in ten (11%) rarely or never avoid foods high in sugar or added sugar.
- WA adults aged 55 to 64 years (47%) were more likely than all other age groups to say they always avoid foods high in sugar or added sugar.
- WA adults aged 18 to 34 years were more likely than those aged 55 to 64 years to say they rarely or never avoid foods high in sugar or added sugar (17% compared with 4%).
- Those with a household income above \$60,000 were more likely than those on a lower income to rarely or never avoid foods high in sugar or added sugar (12% compared with 4%).

## Influences and difficulties to change intake of sugary food and drinks

- For WA adults trying to change their sugary food and drink intake, the top three reasons were to:
  - improve health in general (29%)
  - control weight/prevent weight gain (20%)
  - prevent diabetes (6%)
- Across all respondents, the top three difficulties associated with trying to change the amount of sugary food and drinks consumed were:
  - a liking for the taste (20%)
  - a lack of healthy options available (12%)
  - too many high sugar foods (11%) and high sugar drinks (8%) available.
- One third of the population (35%) said they don't eat foods or drinks with added sugar, or nothing made it difficult for them to change the amount of these items they consume.

Prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate, Public and Aboriginal Health Division

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