

## **Inertia about cutting sugar intake leaves sour taste**

SNP ministers have been accused of dragging their heels on action to reduce Scotland's sugar consumption after research showed that supermarkets are continuing to push unhealthy food at customers.

Nicola Sturgeon promised in January to take action when her administration raised the prospect of introducing a hard-hitting ban on multi-buy offers of high-sugar foods such as cakes and chocolate bars.

But despite the UK government announcing plans for a "sugar tax", the Scottish government has not yet taken any action. Although ministers said again yesterday that they were committed to reducing sugar consumption, they added that they would wait for the outcome of a series of scientific reports before making a decision.

However, opposition politicians said that "doing nothing is not an option" and anti-obesity campaign groups said that regulation should be introduced immediately. A ban on heavily-discounted, multi-buy alcohol deals was introduced by MSPs in 2011 and is credited with helping to reduce excessive alcohol consumption

The added pressure over sugar came after a study of more than 77,000 price promotions across the major supermarkets in Scotland between April and June this year found that more than half were for unhealthy foods.

This follows an investigation by The Times earlier this year which uncovered the extent of unhealthy promotions in Scotland's supermarkets. It found that five bags of sweets were being sold for as little as £1, while major brand chocolate bars were retailing at four for £1. Similar offers were available yesterday in most of the supermarket chains previously sampled.

Alex Cole-Hamilton, for the Liberal Democrats, said: "The Scottish government said they would look at curtailing high-sugar multi-buys but things seem to have gone very quiet. If ministers think action like this will make a difference they should bring forward proposals. Doing nothing is not an option."

Anas Sarwar, for Labour, added: "The SNP government seem to be dragging their heels on taking any action on this, for no good reason. This seems to be a classic case of the SNP promising to do something and then taking zero action for years on end."

Scotland's appalling record on obesity and disease linked to poor diet has been getting worse for years. Two out of three Scottish adults — about three million people — are either overweight or obese, while the figure is one in three for children of primary school age. It is estimated that obesity costs Scotland about £5 billion a year in treatment costs and other measures needed to tackle it.

The new study, from Which?, found that, despite numerous voluntary initiatives aimed at persuading retailers to promote healthy choices, supermarkets are still more likely to feature sugary treats than vegetables in their promotions.

Nutritional items were promoted in 47 per cent of cases, with unhealthy products pushed 53 per cent of the time, according to data from mySupermarket analysed by a team at Which?.

Researchers also found that 52 per cent of confectionery was on promotion, compared with only about a third of fresh fruit and vegetables (30 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively).

Obesity campaigners called on the Scottish government to take more rapid action. Lorraine Tulloch, for Obesity Action Scotland, said that she supported the Which? call for retailers to act but regulation on price promotions was needed.

Tam Fry, of the National Obesity Forum, said that the number of unhealthy promotions was “still far too high” and the Scottish government should be “making a crackdown on these kind of promotions their number one issue” following similar moves in England.

A Scottish government spokesman said ministers were trying to get the food industry to change and that more direct action had not been ruled out.

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August 5 2016, 12:01am, The Times

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/inertia-about-cutting-sugar-intake-leaves-sour-taste-kcklplhqz>