

EFSA consults on approach to free sugars assessment

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The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is seeking comments on the approach it plans to take for its upcoming assessment of dietary sugars, which aims to find a cut-off value or safety limit for free (or added) sugar intake that is not associated with adverse health effects.



EFSA's Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies (NDA) has drafted a [protocol](#) to define the methods and criteria it will use to carry out the work, covering: the collection and acceptance of data, what will be accepted; how it will appraise the relevant evidence; and, the way it will analyse and put together the evidence to draw conclusions for the future scientific opinion.

Dominique Turck, Chair of EFSA's NDA Panel, commented on the Authority's website: "This is an important and complex piece of work, which is why we want to give our stakeholders and members of the public the opportunity to comment on our approach before we start the assessment."

EFSA has set a 4 March deadline for comments, which should be submitted through a dedicated [webpage](#). The Authority is also hosting a technical meeting in Brussels on 13 February to discuss the methodology that will be used in the assessment. [Registration](#) is now open.

The mandate

"Free sugars comprise monosaccharides (glucose, fructose, galactose) and disaccharides (sucrose, lactose, maltose, trehalose) added to foods by

manufacturers or consumers plus sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices, and fruit juice concentrates,” explains EFSA.

It says that the Panel will consider various health effects of free sugars including micronutrient intake and status, body weight and obesity, glucose homeostasis and type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular risk factors and diseases, liver function and dental caries.

The opinion, which follows a request from the national food authorities of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, plus non-EU Iceland and Norway, will help member states to establish recommendations on the consumption of free sugars and to plan food-based dietary guidelines.

In 2010, EFSA provided advice on dietary reference values (DRVs) for carbohydrates and dietary fibre, which included sugar. At the time, the available evidence was insufficient to set an upper limit for the daily intake of total or added sugars.

Added sugar

There is a lot of debate around whether to consider total sugars, including those naturally present in foods, or simply those that are added, which are known as ‘free’ sugars.

The World Health Organisation recommends bringing free sugar levels down to 10% of energy intake, preferably under 5% since that would bring additional health benefits. This means adults consuming no more than 50g or 12 teaspoons of sugar a day and children a maximum 32g or eight teaspoons.

However, at EU level the question about whether labelling should cover total or free sugars is still open, Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, the head of the Commission’s Food information and composition, food waste unit told a Safe Food Advocacy Europe (SAFE) conference last June. The conference saw SAFE launch its trademarked SugarControl label, which complies with the EU’s health and nutrition claims regulation (1924/2006).

An alternative Sugarwise certification and labelling system also exists, which like SugarControl differentiates between added and total sugars.

But some contend that sugar is sugar, whether added or naturally present in a strawberry for example. Yet, since fruit confers other health benefits from the vitamin and mineral content not present in table sugar, most nutritionists agree that there is a difference between eating a sweet fruit like a grape and the same quantity of table sugar, which is why the focus is on free sugars in the EFSA work.