



Healthy Food in Health Care Best Practices *Healthy Beverage Program* Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center

Demographic information

Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) is a 353 bed tertiary-care center in Lebanon, New Hampshire. It is a teaching hospital of the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, employing 6,100 people on its Lebanon campus.

Executive Summary Statement

DHMC's vision is to "achieve the healthiest population possible, leading the transformation of health care in our region and setting the standard for our nation." The obesity epidemic has unfavorable implications for the DHMC workforce and health care system, and DHMC is committed to promoting a healthy nutrition environment in order to achieve this vision. There is growing evidence that sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) directly contribute to obesity as well as other health issues. DHMC has decided to eliminate SSB in efforts to improve the nutritional environment and overall health of its employees.

The Problem

Overweight and obesity rates in the United States are at epidemic levels with approximately two-thirds of adults and one-third of children having a body mass index (BMI) above the healthy average. According to a 2010 Health Media survey and biometric data obtained from the DHMC employees, 60% were overweight or obese and 47% chose weight as their number one health priority. DHMC is self-insured through Anthem. DHMC and Anthem are vested in keeping the DHMC population healthy to reduce health and productivity costs related to obesity.

Addressing the Problem

Before the initiative, SSB were available for purchase in the hospital owned retail areas, at on-site outside retail operations and from vending machines. SSBs were also available to patients, as prescribed by their health care provider.

In March 2011, a DHMC Dietitian from the Live Well/Work Well program and graduate student at The Dartmouth Institute presented her "Environmental and Occupational Health" research paper and recommendations on "Sugar-Sweetened Beverages and Obesity" to DHMC's Healthy Living Committee. Support was gathered from this committee as well as DHMC Leadership Team. The date of Jan. 1, 2012 was set to implement the recommendations set forth in this paper.

DHMC approached this initiative after previous successful experiences in transforming to a healthier hospital environment, which included going tobacco-free in July 2010 and eliminating fryerlators in January 2011. Support and clear communication from DHMC Leadership to adopt this program was a critical factor in implementing their policy, as well as support from Food and Nutrition Services, and the hospital's outside retailers including Allan's Vending, Au Bon Pain, Sbarros, and Cravin's General Store. All retail operations worked with their established vendors to offer new non-SSB offerings.

On January 1, 2012, DHMC eliminated the sale of SSB on its Lebanon campus. Additionally all on-site outside vendors and the vending company voluntarily agreed to discontinue selling SSB in their retail locations. Employees and visitors were still able to bring their own SSB from home if they preferred. Patients were able to receive sugar-sweetened cola and ginger ale beverages only as allowed and approved by their health care

provider. Sweetened milk products were not restricted from retail or patient services. The hospital chose to continue to serve sweetened milk despite the added sugar content on the premise that milk is a valuable source of protein, calcium and other vitamins and minerals. Establishing categories of beverages that were consistent with the report that was guiding their healthy beverage program was instrumental in creating a clear, concise message.

Implementation Process

The stakeholder team included high level DHMC Leadership, the Healthy Living Committee, the Live Well/Work Well Program, and Food and Nutrition Services. This team created the internal “Sugar Sweetened Beverages Frequently Asked Questions” document to educate staff and standardize the message that their healthy beverage program was to be representing. (Document below) Two months prior to the elimination, meetings with the SSB vendors and purchasing managers were held to plan for expanding new non-SSB s.

The SSB policy was officially announced to the DHMC employees two weeks prior to full implementation. This timeline was based on recommendations from the Cleveland Clinic which had banned SSBs in 2010. The roll-out of the program included an education campaign for visitors and staff with a multi-tiered approach:

- “Dine with the Dietitian” informational booths held outside the main dining room to educate employees on health effects of SSB. Graphic models were available depicting the amount of sugar in popular beverages. Samples of non-caloric seltzer waters were also given.
- Written communication was posted on the hospital’s on-line newsletter.
- Written communication was posted at point-of-sale.

For the purposes of tracking the program’s effectiveness in promoting healthful decisions, employees were given the opportunity to complete a 3 question survey outlining their present and future SSB consumption and practices. The survey would be repeated six months after implementation to assess behavior change. Additionally, monthly sales information and quarterly ounce/caloric consumption values are tracked.

Benefits

DHMC saw its new SSB program reflected in sales figures for the first four months after implementation, as compared to the same time period the year before:

- Total cold beverage sales (seltzers, regular and diet soda and sport drinks, and vitamin waters) were down 16%.
- Sales of plain bottled water increased 36.7%.
- Sales of 8 oz. milk cartons increased 3.0%. (Please note, there was no elimination of flavored milks.)

Additionally the medical center calculated the program’s effect on consumption in the **first four months** since implementation

- 674,029 fewer ounces of SSB's were sold. This equates to 33,701 fewer 20-ounce bottles sold, and therefore fewer plastic bottles disposed of in the medical center’s waste stream.

4,754,184 fewer calories of SSB's sold = 1,358 fewer pounds of body weight

DHMC also found that by selling fewer bottled beverages, that they had room in their retail refrigerated display units to sell other healthful items, such as prepared salads, that were previously unavailable. The hospital received good publicity and community attention for the program with coverage in the local newspapers, an article in the *"New Hampshire Business Review"*, and invitations to speak at community events.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

DHMC credits the support from its upper Leadership team and the existence of evidence-based research, which backed the program's intent, as the two principle keys to the successful implementation of the program. It was expected that the major negative reaction to the SSB elimination was the perceived loss of freedom of choice. This issue was addressed by stressing that employees were able to bring their own SSBs into work. Staff also questioned why diet beverages with sugar substitutes were allowed when there have been associated health risks from artificial sugar. The Healthy Living Committee will continue to study the research on the use of artificial sugars, and adjustments to the policy will be made if necessary.

Next Steps

The Healthy Living Committee is recommending that other DHMC locations implement the same SSB elimination program.

DHMC INTERNAL FAQ DOCUMENT

Healthy Beverages Initiative Sugar Sweetened Beverage Frequently Asked Questions

When will the hospital stop selling sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB)?

The new policy is effective as of January 1, 2012.

What areas are affected?

The healthy beverage initiative is a collaborative effort of all Lebanon campus vendors that sell SSB. These include:

- Food and Nutrition Services: Dining Room, East Mall Café, catering
- Vending machines at all onsite and offsite Lebanon office locations
- Food Court vendors including Au Bon Pain, Sbarro, Cravin's

Plans are for the policy to expand to off-site and southern locations after initial implementation occurs on the main campus.

Why is the hospital making this change?

To promote the health and well-being of our patients, families and staff, we will no longer sell sugar-sweetened beverages. As a healthcare institution we are committed to our mission of advancing health and to creating a healthy work environment.

Sugar-sweetened beverages have been linked to obesity and other chronic disease such as type-2 diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

While we respect individual choice, selling sugar-sweetened beverages at our facility does not support our mission and vision.

Other hospitals that have already made this change include Cleveland Clinic and Gifford Medical Center. Several Boston area hospitals have adopted this policy including Carney Hospital and Fairview Hospital. Others have active taskforces around the issue in progress including

Children’s Hospital, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. The city of Boston has also stopped selling sugar-sweetened beverages.

What are sugar-sweetened beverages?

Any drink that contains added sugar. Added sugars can be from natural sources (such as white sugar, brown sugar, honey, agave nectar) or man-made sweeteners (such as high fructose corn syrup).

Examples of sugar-sweetened beverages are:

- regular sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks
- sweetened iced teas, coffees, lemonades, and punches
- fruit or vegetable drinks that are not 100% juice
- flavored waters containing calories

What drinks are available under this new policy?

Water, seltzers, sugar-free or diet drinks, unsweetened coffee and teas, all milks, soymilk beverages, 100% fruit and vegetable juices. You will see an expanded selection of these beverages.

Why not stop selling candy and desserts too?

Liquids don’t make us feel full in the same the way solid food does. When people drink sugar-sweetened beverages they do not compensate by eating less, therefore those calories from the drink become “extra”. Studies looking at weight loss have shown that decreasing liquid calories lead to greater weight reduction than decreasing calories from solid food. That said, as part of a healthy diet sweets should be consumed in moderation.

But don’t milk and juice have sugars?

Milk contains a natural sugar called lactose. Flavored milks, such as chocolate and strawberry, these do contain added sugars, and therefore it is recommended to drink sweetened milks in moderation. Milk is a good source of important nutrients and will continue to be sold in all forms.

100% juice contains a natural sugar called fructose and no added sugars. A serving size for juice is 4 to 6 fluid ounces. Recommendations are to limit juice to one serving per day and get the rest of your fruit servings from fruit.

What about diet drinks? Artificial sweeteners and weight control.

Artificial sweeteners are sugar substitutes that provide sweetness but virtually no calories. They are regulated by the FDA which reviews and approves them as safe prior to being sold. Over the years there have been concerns about possible health effects from consuming artificial sweeteners, specifically increased cancer risk. The National Cancer Institute states that “there is no clear evidence that the artificial sweeteners available commercially in the United States are associated with cancer risk in humans.” While deemed safe, moderation is always a good approach.

While there is strong evidence to support cutting back on sugary drinks, the science isn’t as clear about diet drinks when it comes to weight control. There is some evidence to suggest that regular use might be associated with weight gain. Diet soda can be a useful transition step away from sugar-sweetened beverages, but consumption is not encouraged over the long term. Diet drinks may not be the best substitute for their sugary counterparts, thus it is recommended to choose drinks that are naturally free of added sugars most often.

What if I still want a regular soda or other sugar-sweetened beverage?

Employees, patients and families are able to bring in their own, but the hospital will no longer sell these beverages.

I'm a healthy, active adult. Can I have a sugary drink on occasion?

Yes. Everyone has a budget of calories they can consume in a day and it includes some fun foods. Your daily calorie needs are estimated based on age, gender and activity level. After you meet your nutrition needs from the food groups, the remaining calories, called discretionary calories, can be used on foods and drinks that are higher in sugar, fat and/or alcohol, or extra servings from within a food group.

What if a patient needs regular soda for a medical reason?

At this time regular Coke and Ginger ale will be available for patients. This policy may be revisited in the future. There are alternatives to sugar-sweetened beverages that can often be used (see FAQs following).

Many patients use ginger ale for nausea management. What are alternatives?

Ginger is a widely used remedy for nausea. Any product containing real ginger can help to settle an upset stomach, such as ginger tea, ginger snaps, crystallized ginger or ginger pills. Most ginger ales on the market today actually don't have much if any real ginger in them. That said, many people still report it helps. Other dietary tips for nausea management include:

- snacking on crackers, toast, dry cereal
- more frequent small meals and snacks
- try bland foods, without odor; avoid fatty spicy foods
- smell a lemon

Sweetened beverages such as soda can be used to treat hypoglycemia. What are alternatives?

100% fruit juice provides just as much sugar as a soda and is a fast acting source of glucose for someone whose blood sugars are low. Other dietary choices include honey, table sugar or frosting.

I use soda or energy drinks for the caffeine. What are alternatives?

Individuals may still bring soda onto hospital property if caffeine is needed. Many diet or sugar-free versions of these drinks contain caffeine. Coffee, tea and chocolate are also caffeine sources. There are many ways to increase alertness that don't depend on caffeine including:

- Getting a good night's sleep
- Exercise, being active
- Don't skip meals, especially breakfast
- Relax, meditate
- Listen to a favorite song
- Get some sunshine
- Drink plenty of water