

# DOES AUSTRALIA NEED A FAT TAX?

Following Denmark's introduction of a fat tax, **Eloise King** asks the nutrition experts whether Australia should adopt one too

**W**hen Denmark introduced the world's first "fat tax" last month, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) ran an online poll asking: should Australia increase taxes on unhealthy foods?

Of the 1032 voters, 70 per cent said yes and 30 per cent no\*, suggesting considerable support for a junk-food price hike. Despite Australians being among the fattest people on the planet – and a quarter of our children now obese – the government says a fat tax is not on the menu. Here, health experts weigh in.

\* AT THE TIME OF PRINTING



Dr Steve Hambleton, president of the Australian Medical Association

**"A TAX SHOULD APPLY TO JUNK FOOD, SWEETS AND CARBONATED DRINKS"**

"People complain about us turning into a nanny state, but the AMA poll provides pretty strong evidence that most people are in favour of an unhealthy food tax. The health impacts of things like smoking, alcohol and junk food are not covered by the tax already imposed on these things. But they should be."



**"A JUNK-FOOD TAX ALONE WON'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM"**  
Michelle Bridges, trainer on The Biggest Loser

"A junk-food tax will have an effect, without a doubt, but the government should use the junk-tax money to subsidise healthy wholefood so it becomes the cheaper option. We need to look at the measures used to combat tobacco use because good progress has been made here. One option might be allowing fewer fast-food outlets to be built in any one vicinity."



**"IT WOULD BE BETTER TO MAKE FRUIT AND VEGIES FREE"**  
 Dr John Tickell, anti-obesity campaigner

"A junk-food tax is a good idea, but it's virtually impossible to implement because there are so many lobby groups. As a nation, we spend \$13 billion on cigarettes each year and \$13 billion on fruit and vegetables. If the government had any guts, which they don't, they'd double the price of cigarettes, which kill us, and give fruit and vegetables away for free. Type 2 diabetes used to be a condition that came on in your late 40s, but now kids as young as six are getting it because they are eating too much junk and sitting in front of computers all day. There is all of this evidence and Julia Gillard is about to spend \$36 billion of our tax dollars on making computers go faster."



**"THE DIFFICULTY IS DEFINING WHAT JUNK FOOD IS"**  
 Aloysa Hourigan, Nutrition Australia's senior nutritionist

"A junk-food tax already exists in Australia in theory. Health food items don't attract the goods and services tax (GST), which was introduced in 1999, but junk food does. The problem is that when GST was rolled out, the price of healthy food increased too because of taxes on things like freight and petrol. There have been various policies introduced in school canteens to change the nature of food available, based on reducing the amount of saturated fat, sugar and salt. But when food manufacturers got this information, they simply started putting less potato crisps into tiny packets so they kept within the specified amount of fat in one serving."



**"A JUNK-FOOD TAX'S REVENUE MUST BE INVESTED IN HEALTH PROMOTION"**  
 Dr Ronald McCoy, from the Royal Australian College Of General Practitioners

"We need a punitive tax on junk food so healthier foods become economically appealing. But it must be part of a broader, multi-faceted approach to addressing lifestyle-related illnesses. The money raised must go back into health promotion. We spend so many resources on reducing the impact of alcohol, but research shows low fruit and vegetable consumption imposes the same health risks." ●

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**Did you know?** Denmark's fat tax adds about \$3 to the price of every kilogram of saturated fat in all foods that contain more than 2.3 per cent saturated fat.