

## Grade 9 Writing Prompt

Lawmakers are considering passing a law that will tax junk food, similar to the current laws taxing cigarettes and alcohol. Write a letter to your state legislators arguing whether or not they should impose a junk food tax in Utah. Your essay must be based on ideas, concepts, and information from the “Junk Food Taxes” passage set.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- plan your essay;
- write your essay; and
- revise and edit your essay.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources.

Do not over rely on one source. Type your answer in a new Word document.

## Bad Food? Tax It, and Subsidize Vegetables

By Mark Bittman

What will it take to get Americans to change our eating habits? The need is indisputable, since heart disease, diabetes and cancer are all in large part caused by the standard American diet. A healthy diet could save hundreds of billions of dollars in health care costs.

Yet the food industry appears incapable of marketing healthier foods. But the fixes are not really their problem. Their mission is profit, so they'll continue to sell the health-damaging food that's most profitable, until the market or another force skews things otherwise. That "other force" should be the federal government, fulfilling its role as an agent of the public good.

Currently, instead of taxing sodas and other unhealthful food, we subsidize them. We should turn the tables and tax things like soda, French fries, and doughnuts.

Sweetened drinks could be taxed at 2 cents per ounce, so a six-pack of Pepsi would cost \$1.44 more than it does now. An equivalent tax on fries might be 50 cents per serving; a quarter extra for a doughnut.

Simply put: taxes would reduce consumption of unhealthful foods and generate billions of dollars annually. That money could be used to subsidize the purchase of staple foods like seasonal greens, vegetables, whole grains, dried legumes and fruit. We could sell those staples cheap. Since poor people suffer disproportionately from the cost of high-quality, fresh foods, subsidizing those foods would be particularly beneficial to them.

This program would upset the processed food industry. It would also bug those who might resent paying more for soda and chips and argue that their right to eat whatever they wanted was being breached. But public health is the role of the government, and our diet is right up there with any other public responsibility, from water treatment to mass transit.

One-third of all Americans either have diabetes or are pre-diabetic. The percentage of obese adults has more than doubled over the last 30 years; the percentage of obese children has tripled. Because our health care bills are on the verge of becoming truly insurmountable, this is urgent for economic sanity as well as national health. Health-related obesity costs are projected to reach \$344 billion by 2018, with roughly 60 percent of that cost borne by the federal government.

The projected benefits are impressive; one study suggests that a national penny-per-ounce tax on sugar-sweetened beverages would generate at least \$13 billion a year in income while cutting consumption by 24 percent. Those numbers would swell dramatically if the tax were extended to more kinds of junk food. In the next decade this could prevent 1.5 million Americans from becoming obese and 400,000 cases of diabetes, saving about \$30 billion.

## **Junk Food Taxes Don't Work**

By Michael D. Thomas

What if there was a way to fix various health problems that had a variety of benefits and very little cost? This is the promise that comes with taxing items to change consumer behavior. But, you should be a bit more skeptical of this approach.

In research published by George Mason University, we explore the taxation of junk food in more detail. We found that many people live in areas where little else besides this type of food is available, areas called food deserts –urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

On top of this, salt and sugar are the most popular preservatives. That means food won't spoil, unlike a banana or an apple slice. Convenience is an important aspect of food purchases.

The premise of the easy fix of taxing junk food is basic economics. A tax works by raising the final price to consumers, which means that the final quantity of taxed goods will decline as the price rises. With the consumption of food, however, reducing purchases in one area must be offset by purchases in another area.

Without good alternatives for the poor, this raises the prices on the junk food they consume without a change in behavior. The USDA estimates that 23.5 million U.S. citizens live in food deserts. Most of these people are low-income. When everything they are likely to buy rises in price, they have less money for non-food purchases. This reduction in their ability to make purchases makes them poorer.

Not only does this approach of tax first not work, it directs our attention away from useful solutions to the problem. Policy has to make it easier for grocery stores to open in low-income areas. Consumers need to learn more about healthy diets. Include lower-income folks in the economy and raise their overall income, ultimately a more important issue.

From Thomas, Michael D. "Junk Food Taxes Don't Work." *U.S. News & World Report*. March 2, 2015. Web.

## The Navajo Nation Will Soon Have the Country's First-Ever Junk-Food Tax

Leilani Clark

The Navajo Nation will become the first place in the United States to impose a tax on junk food. The Healthy Diné Nation Act mandates a 2 percent sales tax on chips, soda, fried foods, sweetened beverages, and other products with "minimal-to-no-nutritional value" sold within the borders of the reservation.

The sales tax will generate an estimated \$1 million a year for wellness projects. These include greenhouses, cooking classes, community gardens, farmers' markets, and more.

The heavy consumption of soda, fat, and processed foods has taken its toll. The Indian Health Service estimates 25,000 of the Navajo Nation's 300,000 members have type-2 diabetes. Another 75,000 are pre-diabetic. The tribe has some of the worst health outcomes in the United States, with rampant hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

"Some people thought: 'A two-percent sales tax is going to hit my wallet,'" says Navajo Delegate Jonathan Nez. The legislation was vetoed three times by Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, because of questions about how the tax would be regulated. He also cited concerns about its potential impact on small business owners. Other opponents said the bill would place undue burden on consumers and drive desperately needed revenue off the reservation. After multiple revisions, the tax gained support from a majority of the council.

It's too soon to evaluate the tax's effect on consumption habits in the Navajo Nation. Nez says it has already opened a discussion "about how to take better care of yourself. We talk about how to return back to the way we used to live, with fresh produce, vegetables, and fruit along with our own traditional unprocessed foods."

From Clark, Leilani. "The Navaho Nation Will Soon Have the Country's First-Ever Junk-Food Tax." *Mother Jones*. March 25, 2015. Web.

# **Soda Tax Passes; Philadelphia Is First Big City in Nation to Enact One**

by Tricia L. Nadolny

Looking to raise millions for a bold expansion of early childhood education, Philadelphia City Council on Thursday approved a 1.5-cent-per-ounce tax on sugar-sweetened and diet beverages, the first such tax imposed in a major U.S. city.

Critics quickly vowed a court challenge. And as the city introduces the unprecedented levy - and its economic and public-health effects come into view - experts, advocates, and legislators will surely be watching closely.

Mayor Kenney called it a start to "changing the narrative of poverty in our city."

It is expected to raise about \$91 million annually to be spent on expanding prekindergarten programs in the city; creating community schools; improving parks, recreation centers, and libraries; and offering a tax credit for businesses that sell healthy beverages.

Philadelphia's tax will be levied on distributors. The tax could add up to 18 cents to the cost of a 12-ounce can, \$1 to the cost of a 2-liter container, and \$2.16 to the cost of a 12-pack.

Critics of the plan have said it will lead to the loss of beverage industry jobs and disproportionately affect the poor. Proponents argued that the tax will lift Philadelphians out of poverty by paying for investments in the city's most struggling neighborhoods.

A statement from the beverage industry's anti-tax coalition called the tax unconstitutional and said the group would fight it in court.

"We believe we're on strong legal ground. We'll see what they do," Kenney said. "They spent a long time twisting the facts of this whole debate with millions of dollars and that wasn't effective. So we'll fight the next fight when it comes."

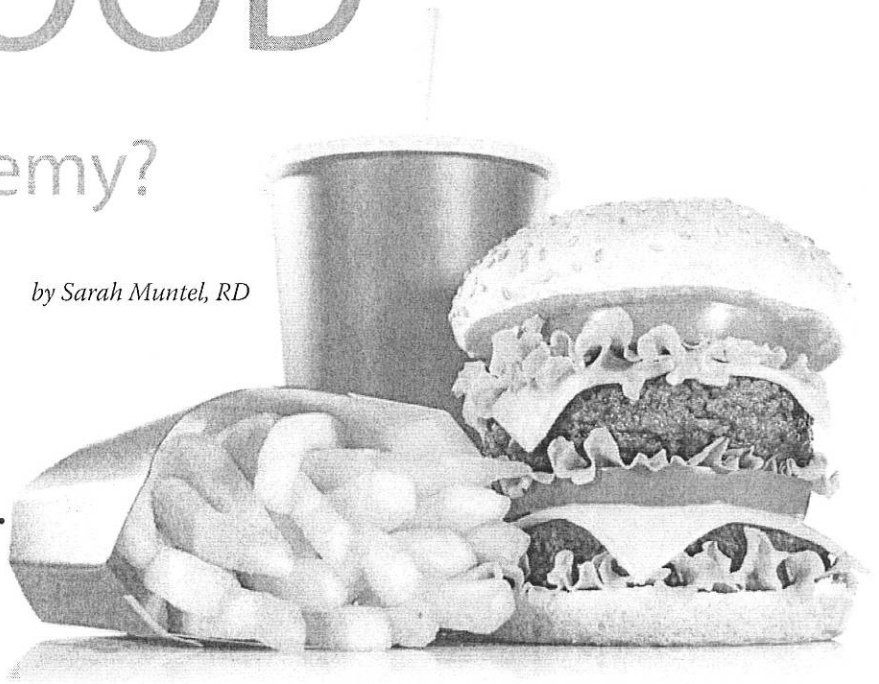
From Nadolny, Tricia L. "Soda Tax Passes; Philadelphia Is First Big City in Nation to Enact One." *Inquirer Daily News*. June 16, 2016. Web.

# FAST FOOD

## – Is it the Enemy?

Since 1970, the amount of fast food restaurants in business doubled, which equates to about 300,000 establishments in the United States. Coincidentally, 33.8 percent of the U.S. population is affected by obesity and 19 percent of children and adolescents are also affected. Could there be a link between fast food and obesity?

*by Sarah Muntel, RD*



## IS FAST FOOD TO BLAME?

Let's look at a few typical fast food menu items, which do not contain drinks or sides:

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|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • McDonalds Big Mac:            | 540 calories and 29 g of fat |
| • Burger King Whopper:          | 670 calories and 40 g of fat |
| • Wendy's Bacon Deluxe Double:  | 880 calories and 52 g of fat |
| • Taco Bell Nachos Bell Grande: | 770 calories and 24 g of fat |

Now let's throw in the sides:

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Medium fries at McDonalds:     | 380 calories and 19 g of fat |
| • Onion rings at Dairy Queen:    | 360 calories and 16 g of fat |
| • Regular cole slaw at Popeye's: | 260 calories and 23 g of fat |

And don't forget the drinks:

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| • Large Frosty at Wendy's:              | 540 calories and 8 g of fat  |
| • Large sweet tea at McDonalds:         | 280 calories and 0 g of fat  |
| • Iced Carmel Latte from Dunkin Donuts: | 450 calories and 12 g of fat |

