

Mums say innovate to beat sugar problem



Brisbane, Australia, March 23rd, 2017 - Sugar, sugar everywhere and most Australians are eating way too much of it without even realising it. A study from the University of Sydney found that more than half of all Australians and 76 percent of teens eat more than the recommended amount of sugar every day leading to an increase in health issues such as obesity and diabetes 2. Brisbane parents Nicci Hinckfuss and Karen Cranney were so concerned with the problem that they teamed up with the design experts at **[toughproblem] consultancy** to see if they could find ways to help people, especially children, reduce the amount of sugar they consume. “This has been a wonderful collaboration with people passionate about wanting to make a difference” says Nicci, mum to four kids 18 years and under.

We conducted research with parents, teachers, nutrition experts and children that revealed some interesting insights. For example, most parents and children are unaware of their recommended daily sugar intake and most assume that only sweet things are high in sugar, yet we found that savoury foods such as soups and sauces often contain high amounts of sugar. It wasn't surprising to find that foods with high sugar content tend to be at the centre of special occasions and are used as rewards and treats making them highly accessible. In addition, they found that parents and children are not inclined to read or interpret food labels. But how much is too much? Peter Vozvoteka, head designer at **[toughproblem]** says, “Parents and children have no boundaries when it comes to sugar. We found that parents tend to be more focused on safety and school grades and generally feel guilty about restricting access to ice cream or other sweets because it's feared they are not allowing “kids to be kids”. But we're not proposing to be the fun police. Rather, it's about providing tools and information for people to make better choices about their sugar intake”.

The research inspired several innovations. According to Clare Villalba from **[toughproblem]**, “We have developed some unique, people focused innovations aiming to empower parents and children to quickly and easily realise their recommended sugar intake, interpret nutritional information on

product labels and to make informed decisions about the food they are consuming”. The solution involves a three-pronged approach.

The first innovation is an ingenious ‘Sugar Number - rule of thumb’ which helps parents and children recall their daily recommended sugar intake. To calculate your sugar number all you need to do is follow a simple rule for children aged 5-18 - ‘**Double your age is your daily intake in grams**’. This makes it easy for parents and children to conveniently calculate their ‘sugar number’ by simply doubling their age. Current recommendations from a leading Health Organisation advise an actual limit of sugar for children aged 4-9 years is 12-16 grams and between 20-32 grams for ages 10-16 years. So if we apply the rule, a 12-year-old child, for example, will have a desirable sugar number of approximately 24 grams or less (see the table below for more examples).

Age	Rule of thumb (double your age)	Sugar Number
5-year-old	5 + 5	= 10g
8 -year-old	8 + 8	= 16g
11-year-old	11 + 11	= 22g
14-year-old	14 + 14	= 28g
17-year-old	17_+ 17	= 34g

To animate these principles, the team have created an innovative and captivating Sugar Song and jingle titled, “**Don't be Slack... Read the Pack**”. The catchy lyrics and music aim to help children recall their sugar number and encourage them to read the nutritional information on food and drink products. According to the creator Mark Traynor from Lightknights Entertainment, “the song reinforces personal and parental responsibility around sugar intake. Brisbane singer Jacqui Schwantes brings an infectious and fresh sound which will appeal to a wide audience. We’re hoping the campaign will be as iconic as the successful ‘Slip, Slop, Slap - Sun Safety’ awareness campaign from the 1980’s and encourage the use of the song in educational institutions and at home. So it would be ideal for the government to offer some assistance to get these innovations into schools and households”. Another innovation is our **Sugar-O-Meter**. A large, colourful sticker, the Sugar-o-Meter shows a metered dial that categorises foods according to the sugar content. Healthy, low sugar foods at one end of the dial, has a green label at the top to indicate that they can be eaten ‘Every Day’. The remaining sections are “Some Days,” “Special Occasions” and “No Way” foods (sugar-sweetened soft drinks display a red danger label). The Sugar-O-Meter is a sticker that is personalised based on your child’s Sugar Number and then stuck on their lunchbox or on the fridge. When children and their parents are selecting foods, they can quickly check the sugar on the nutritional label and see where it sits on their ‘Sugar-O-Meter’ to help to easily work out what foods are appropriate and how often they should be consuming different items. “We’re thrilled,” say Nicci and

Karen, “these innovations are fresh, practical and sustainable”. [*toughproblem*] are working on developing several **Sugar Educational Worksheets** to help children learn the most basic sugar principles. The worksheets will teach children how to read and understand nutritional information panels on food and drink products, convert grams of sugar into teaspoons and calculate their desirable ‘sugar number’. Our simple ‘**1 to 4 Hand**’ tool makes it easy for a parent and child to convert grams to teaspoons. One teaspoon (thumb) is equivalent to four grams of sugar (fingers).

Karen says, “These tools are so handy. I can now have a conversation with my 9-year-old daughter about the appropriate amount of sugar in her diet and with my help she can read the amount of sugar in a product, recall her sugar number and then convert grams to teaspoons. Pretty soon she will be able to do this on her own”.

Read more about this project and download the 'Sugar-O-Meter' lunchbox sticker and 'Sugar Song' at <http://www.toughproblem.com.au/Project-Sugar>

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