

For immediate release

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Juices and ‘diet’ drinks to go from hospital shelves and meals

Following the removal of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in March 2014, the Nelson Marlborough District Health Board has strengthened its policy and will remove artificially-sweetened beverages (ASBs), sugar-added juices, flavoured waters and pre-packaged ‘smoothie’ drinks.

From 1 May 2016 these drinks will no longer be available from hospital cafes, shops and vending machines, nor will they be served to patients. Instead, patients and visitors will be offered a range of water, coconut water, plain milk, plain milk alternatives (such as almond milk), teas and coffee.

NMDHB Chief Executive Chris Fleming says the 2014 *Healthy Eating for Staff and Visitors* policy addresses the detrimental effect of SSBs on oral health, and their role in obesity and type 2 diabetes.

However, ASBs and juices are also detrimental to teeth and general health, says Mr Fleming.

“Artificially-sweetened beverages may be free of calories but not of consequences,” he says. “They encourage sugar craving and sugar dependence, and are strongly associated with dental erosion due to their high acidity.”

Mr Fleming says there’s emerging evidence showing that ‘diet’ drinks can also cause weight gain.

One study followed 3,600 individuals for seven years. After adjusting for factors that contribute to weight gain such as dieting, exercising change, or diabetes status, the study showed that those who drank ASBs had a 50 percent higher increase in Body Mass Index than those who did not.ⁱ

District health boards aim to improve the health of New Zealanders, so need to ‘walk the talk,’ Mr Fleming says.

“Our *Healthy Eating for Staff and Visitors* policy sends a clear message regarding diet and health and our commitment to the health of people in our region,” he says.

“We were the first DHB to take sugary drinks off our shelves, and hope to continue to be a catalyst for change across DHBs nationwide.”

Ends

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ⁱ Anthony A Laverty, Lucia Magee, Carlos A. Monteiro, Sonia Saxena and Christopher Millett. Sugar and artificially sweetened beverage consumption and adiposity changes: National longitudinal study. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* (2015) 12:137 DOI 10.1186/s12966-015-0297-y