

Sugar Industry Quashed Link Between Sugar And Heart Disease Over 50 Years Ago, Says Report

Article can be found on: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nancyhuehnergarth/2016/09/12/sugar-industry-quashed-findings-linking-sugar-to-heart-disease-over-50-years-ago-says-report/#479e4db17ce0>

A startling new [report](#) published today in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that more than 50 years ago, sugar industry-funded and guided research successfully suppressed findings linking sugar intake to an increased risk of heart disease.

The influential 1967 literature review, written by prominent nutrition researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health and published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*, determined that dietary cholesterol and saturated fat were risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD), while criticizing studies that linked sugar to CVD.

The researchers, D. Mark Hegsted and Robert McGandy, who were paid to write the review by the sugar industry's trade group, the Sugar Research Foundation (SRF), now known as the Sugar Association, did not reveal the SRF's funding and influence in shaping the review. The review recommended that Americans reduce their intake of dietary cholesterol and substitute polyunsaturated fat for saturated fat.

"The literature review helped shape not only public opinion on what causes heart problems but also the scientific community's view of how to evaluate dietary risk factors for heart disease," said lead author Cristin Kearns, DDS, MBA, of the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). Kearns discovered industry documents in public archives that shed light on how the sugar industry wielded influence over the review.

The [paper published today](#) describes, in detail, how after a spate of research in the early 1960's linked heart disease to sugar consumption, a worried sugar industry, through the SRF, authorized and funded Project 226, a literature review of research on the risk factors for coronary heart disease. It also described how an SRF Vice President, John Hickson, repeatedly interacted with the researchers while they worked on the review, providing them with articles, receiving drafts and reminding them of the SRF's [objective](#) for funding the study:

Our particular interest had to do with that part of nutrition in which there are claims that carbohydrates in the form of sucrose make an inordinate contribution to the metabolic condition. (Hickson to Hegsted on July 30, 1965)

We are well aware of your particular interest in carbohydrate and will cover this as well as we can. (Hegsted's reply)

According to the [report](#), Hickson received a final draft of the literature review on October 25, 1966 and wrote to Hegsted on November 2nd, "Let me assure you this is quite what we had in mind and we look forward to its appearance in print."

"As the saying goes, he who pays the piper calls the tune," said senior author Stanton A. Glantz, PhD, UCSF professor of medicine and director of the UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education. "There are all kinds of ways that you can subtly manipulate the outcome of a study, which industry is very well practiced at."

The 1967 literature review paid for by the sugar industry still reflects its current position on sugar and heart disease. After the American Heart Association put out a [recommendation](#) last month that children ages 2 to 18 consume no more than six teaspoons of sugar daily, the Sugar Association [argued](#) vehemently against the advice and questioned the science behind the suggestion, stating that, "the added sugars dialogue has lost its scientific integrity."

Industry funding of nutrition research has become a deep concern for nutrition experts as it has been found in several studies to [favor the funder's interests](#). Jim Krieger, MD, MPH, executive director of [Healthy Food America](#), pointed out that, "As recently as last year, [Coca-Cola KO +0.69%](#) was [exposed](#) paying researchers to make the claim that being physically active can mitigate the effects of excessive consumption of its products."

Krieger's concern is well founded. "There is now a considerable body of evidence linking added sugars to hypertension and cardiovascular disease," said study co-author Laura Schmidt, PhD, who is also principal investigator on the UCSF-led [SugarScience](#) initiative. "Yet, health policy documents are still inconsistent in citing heart disease risk as a health consequence of added sugars consumption."

In a newly published [commentary](#) that accompanies the paper, New York University nutrition professor Marion [Nestle](#) noted that the study authors, "have produced compelling evidence" that the SRF initiated, funded and influenced research "expressly to exonerate sugar as a major risk factor for coronary heart disease (CHD)."

Nestle expressed hope that the newly-discovered information about the sugar industry's influence over the 1967 literature review will "serve as a warning... (about) the need to consider the harm to scientific credibility and public health when dealing with studies funded by food companies with vested interests in the results."

"How many lives and dollars could have been saved...if the industry were not manipulating science in this way?" asked Krieger.

UPDATE 9/12: The Sugar Association posted a [statement](#) on the Kearns/JAMA Study. From the statement: We acknowledge that the Sugar Research Foundation should have exercised greater transparency in all of its research activities, however, when the studies in question were published funding disclosures and transparency standards were not the norm they are today. Beyond this, it is challenging for us to comment on events that allegedly occurred 60 years ago, and on documents we have never seen.

The Sugar Association also expressed concern for the "growing use of headline-baiting articles to trump quality scientific research – we're disappointed to see a journal of JAMA's stature being drawn into this trend."