

# UW Health

*An integrated health system uses research and ethics to support its decision to remove sugar sweetened beverages*

## Timeline

2011

American Family Children's Hospital, the children's hospital within the UW Health system, participated in Children's Hospital Association's Focus on a Fitter Future, a collaborative effort of 25 children's hospitals across the US. This effort was focused on health promotion and prevention strategies to address childhood obesity.

Interwoven in this work, was the Healthy Hospital Environment Committee which developed a suite of resources to assist hospitals in beginning a dialogue and instituting change in their institutions to improve the hospital environment. After taking a closer look, they were compelled to initiate change and align with the goals of a healthier hospital environment, starting with a transformation of the food culture at UW Health.

2013

UW Health drew inspiration from the CDC's Toolkit for Creating Healthier Hospital Food, Beverage and Physical Activity Environments and created a multi-disciplinary workgroup committed to establishing policies, systems and environmental changes to provide nourishing food and beverages that promote healing and demonstrate cultural diversity. To assess all culinary service operations, they created a Healthy Food and Beverage Process Assessment tool to monitor the food and beverage environment for: 1) product, 2) preparation, 3) portion size, 4) placement, 5) pricing, 6) promotion, and 7) purchasing practices. Retail venues are assessed quarterly which inspires new initiatives and provides data to support those new initiatives.

2014

The dashboard and a thorough review of literature linking added sugars and health problems such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease proved instrumental in making the case for removing sugar sweetened beverages (SSB). In October, UW Health, removed all SSBs from retail and room service locations and 60% of beverages offered do not contain a non-nutritive sweetener. Visitors and staff were allowed to bring in their own SSBs, but faculty and staff were encouraged to lead by example and also make a commitment to their health. The mission to provide local, sustainable and nourishing food and beverage items in all food venues continued by the removal of deep fat fryers in December 2014.

2015

One year after removing sugar-sweetened beverages from all UW Health locations, healthier options such as sparkling waters and infused teas made up nearly 50 percent of beverage sales organization wide.

2017

Healthy food and beverages options continue to expand in all venues which has translated to consumers practicing healthier behaviors, too. Healthy beverage sales reached nearly 71%! Annually, the workgroup reviews the literature on non-nutritive sweeteners (NNS). At present, all NNS, like those found in diet sodas, are generally recognized as safe (GRAS) by the USDA. However, there is some evidence that certain sweeteners, such as aspartame, sucralose and saccharin may have a negative impact on health.

TODAY

UW Health's focus is to be stewards of the environment by contributing to the local food system in environmentally, economically and socially responsible ways.

## Health System Statistics

### Removed SSB in 2014

**LOCATIONS** 6 hospitals and more than 80 outpatient sites

**SERVES** More than 600,000 patients each year in the Upper Midwest and beyond

**FOOD SERVICE** Independently Operated

**EMPLOYEES** Approximately 1,500 physicians and 16,500 staff

**WEBSITE** [uwhealth.org](http://uwhealth.org)

*"We have a pervasive desire to support and promote the health of our community."*

*Amy Mihm MS, RDN, Clinical Nutrition Specialist*

## Challenges and Opportunities

UW Health did extensive research and proactively addressed the challenges that removing SSBs would present, including a temporary decline in revenue.

UW Health was well-aware that changing consumer behavior would be challenging. UW Health posted a series of educational messaging to confirm that this was a strategic and informed decision, based on input from patients and families and employee surveys.

UW Health also posted helpful tips to help patients and employees to make behavior changes and how to wean self from soda. UW Health used several tactics to inform several audiences, including posting articles on external, internal websites and social media; created FAQs and comment cards; established a dedicated email inbox so as a way to provide feedback, ask questions and for clarification; wrapped vending machines; and offered taste testing of new products in vending machines.

As a healthcare system, UW Health is committed to modeling healthy food and beverage choices. UW Health serves more than 2.5 million meals annually and has the opportunity to positively impact the commercial market. UW Health focused on increasing its selection of healthy beverages and installed water filter stations.

## Strategies for Success

UW Health learned three primary lessons from removing sugar-sweetened beverages.

### 1 Leadership commitment to change is critical

Identify and collect important data that speaks the language of key administrators who are essential in moving an initiative forward. UW Health successfully used their [Healthy Food and Beverage Process Assessment tool](#) to gather baseline data and then monitored consumer behaviors through sales revenue.

### 2 Recognize your Champions

Approaches to initiating changes to the food and beverage environment needs to be as multifaceted as the change itself. Enlist the champions that can advocate for change from all perspectives including clinicians, researchers and academia, business operations, marketing and consumers.

### 3 Prioritize education and communication

Empower the “front line” culinary services staff with the knowledge as to why the decision to remove SSB was made and verbiage to respond to questions about the change. As the most accessible resource to consumers, these staff members will likely field the majority of feedback – positive and negative. Take important steps to frequently educate consumers and offer samples of the healthy products replacing SSBs.

To assume there will be no consumer discord is short-sighted and may inflate the situation. At the start, and still today, we observe that most individuals express concerns about how this change will affect them, personally. Once their voice is heard and then they are invited to consider how this decision positively affects the health of a larger community of people, most come to accept why SSBs were removed.