

Click here to try **our new website** — you can come back at any time

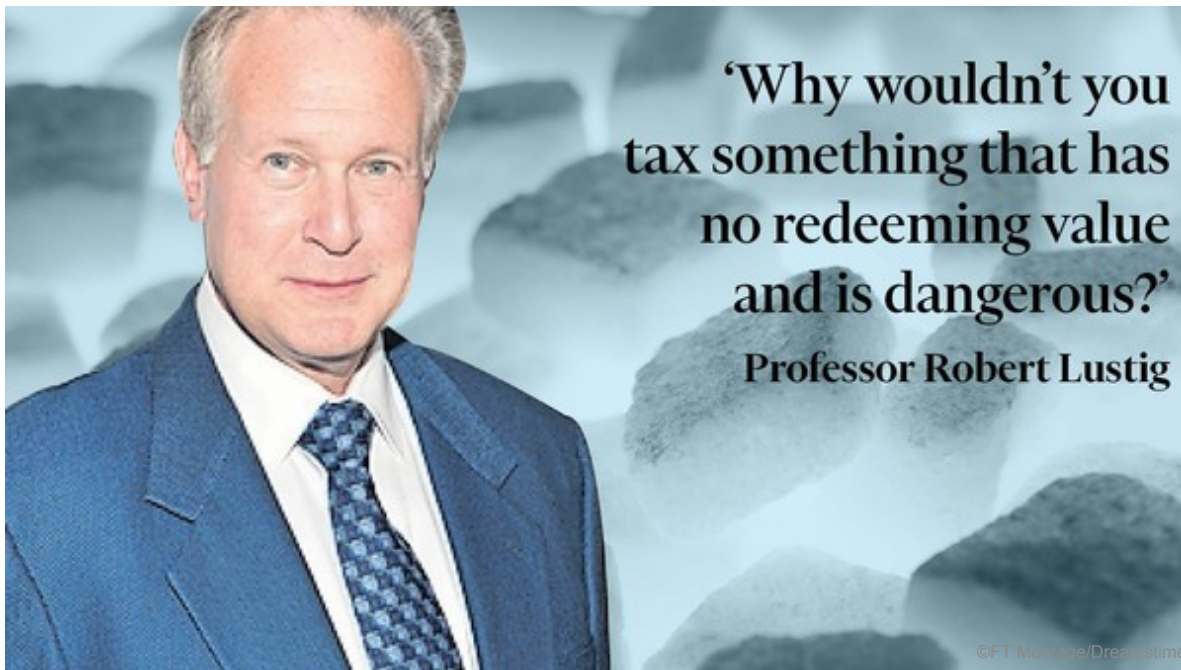
March 18, 2016 6:09 pm

# Robert Lustig: godfather of the sugar tax

Izabella Kaminska

[Share](#)
[Author alerts](#)
[Print](#)
[Clip](#)
[Gift Article](#)

[Comments](#)



The godfather of the sugar tax, the man who started the war on fizzy drinks, is a slightly overweight grey-haired New Yorker who has spent almost two decades studying childhood obesity.

Professor Robert Lustig, of the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine, went viral on July 30 2009 with a YouTube video called *Sugar: The Bitter Truth*.

The video, in which he argues that sugar, and particularly sugary soft drinks, is more to blame for childhood obesity than saturated fat, has since been viewed more than 6m times.

Follow the twists and turns with UK Politics—our free email briefing

In the wake of chancellor George Osborne's decision this week to bring the sugar tax to Britain, Prof Lustig said the move may not go far enough.

on each day's main  
political developments.

## Sign up now

“If there is an inconsistency in how the UK tax has been laid out, it is that juice should be taxed the same way as soda because from a metabolic standpoint juice is the same as soda,” he said.

And he had little time for the squeals from the soft drinks lobby that taxing sugary drinks could divert children to other sugar hits, such as chocolate.

“Why wouldn't you tax something that has no redeeming value and is dangerous?” he said. “Because it is liquid sugar, it does not suppress the hunger hormone so you end up consuming even more. So getting rid of drinks really does make sense in terms of getting the consumption down. As opposed to chocolates, you can keep drinking until the cows come home.”

That observation dovetails with one of the key findings of Prof Lustig's research: not all calories are equal.

Some, such as those emanating from sugar, especially from high-fructose corn syrup, have a far more dangerous impact on our metabolism. Sugar's addictive qualities, and the way it is delivered into our bodies, make it a particular problem.

“High-fructose corn syrup gets absorbed even more rapidly and goes straight to the liver, where it causes even more damage,” he said. He suggested that sugar was a poison, and that fizzy drinks were the equivalent of a lethal shot in the arm.

Since first publishing his findings in 2007, Prof Lustig has been a thorn in the sides of soft-drink manufacturers, as well as being an irritant to the industry peddling low-fat foods. Some industry watchers have as a consequence described the YouTube video as sugar's “tobacco” moment.

The US is more exposed to sugary drinks than the UK, consuming 37 per cent of its added sugar in liquid form. British consumers receive 27 per cent of their added sugar from jam, sweets and chocolate, according to the NHS, and 25 per cent from soft drinks and juice.

Getting rid of drinks really does make sense in terms of getting the consumption down. As opposed to chocolates, you can keep drinking until the cows come home

- Professor Robert Lustig

Prof Lustig said defining a soft drink was easy, which made the tax easy to implement, and he argued that “there's nothing in them remotely of value because there's no nutrition to be obtained”.

His views have been echoed in recent years by Credit Suisse and Morgan Stanley, with the investment banks suggesting that a sugar tax could also boost economic productivity.

“Theoretically, all foods containing added sugar should be targeted in an attempt to reduce daily intake; however, soft drinks could effectively bear the brunt of any financial levy,” predicted Giles Keating and Stefano Natella from Credit Suisse in 2013, leaning on Prof Lustig's findings.

The professor praised Jamie Oliver, the celebrity chef, who appeared in front of the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday to cheer the new levy.

“Jamie was very outspoken and he levied a tax in his own restaurant — I’m prepared to give him credit,” he said. “I’m interested in fixing the problem.”

**RELATED TOPICS** Food Diet & Health

[Share](#) [Author alerts](#) [Print](#) [Clip](#) [Gift Article](#)

[Comments](#)



My City: Havana



The race to get India online



FirstFT - Brazil's constitutional crisis, Google to sell robot maker

**PROMOTED CONTENT**

Promoted By CA Technologies

**Mobile Gaming Gets Real**

Not long ago, Mark Ladd was watching his kids entertain friends whom they had invited over to the house. But they weren't doing the kinds of things kids have been doing for ages, like going outside to play tag or hit around a baseball ... [See more](#)

**Printed from:** <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/311a74ec-ed24-11e5-888e-2eadd5fbc4a4.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2016 FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.