**Sugar’s day of reckoning may be here**

By Yvonne Abraham Globe Staff, September 28, 2019

The American Heart Association points out that every year, 40,000 cardiovascular deaths can be attributed to overconsumption of sugary drinks, and that obesity-related diseases alone could cost us $950 billion a year by 2030. The American Heart Association points out that every year, 40,000 cardiovascular deaths can be attributed to overconsumption of sugary drinks, and that obesity-related diseases alone could cost us $950 billion a year by 2030. As the swift, sweeping restrictions on vaping products enacted in recent weeks show, our governments are more than capable of stepping in to protect public health from potentially lethal threats when they want to.

Now let’s do guns. Just kidding! That’s ridiculous. But how about sugar?

Evidence has been building in recent years that the white stuff on which so many are hooked is very, very bad for us. Eating too much sugar is making us obese, and giving us hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. The American Heart Association points out that every year, 40,000 cardiovascular deaths can be attributed to overconsumption of sugary drinks, and that obesity-related diseases alone could cost us $950 billion a year by 2030. If current trends continue, sugar will help break our health care system.

“America’s downfall will not be from some terrorist organization or North Korea,” said Jon Santiago, a state rep from Boston who is also an ER physician. “It will be due to our inability to pay for health care because of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic health issues.”

Before we go any further, let me get this out of the way. Sweet is my jam. If past lives are an actual thing, I was once a fly. I love sugar only slightly less than I love my own child. Researching this subject has pretty much ruined my life. And now I want to do the same for you. You’re welcome!

Health experts say women and kids should be eating just 6 teaspoons of sugar a day. Men can get away with 9. But the average American is putting away a whopping 17 teaspoons of sugar a day — 57 pounds each year.

For the longest time, we were obsessed with fat. And that’s the way Big Sugar wanted to keep it. When we started taking evil fat out of processed foods, we made them taste less cardboardy by adding sugar. The sweet stuff is everywhere, including in places you might not expect, like in yogurt and granola.

But it’s now clear that sugary food can be just as harmful as fatty food. And the bulk of this poison comes to us via sugary drinks.

I took a spin around my corner store a couple days ago to read some labels. I kind of wish I hadn’t: A 20-ounce bottle of Coke contained 65 grams — over 15 teaspoons — of sugar, as did just 16 ounces of that teeth-destroyer known as Mountain Dew. That little 14-ounce bottle of Nesquick chocolate milk your kid begs for packs in 4 teaspoons of sugar.

If we could convince enough Americans to resist unconscionably aggressive marketing by the beverage industry, we could get a handle on our sugar problem.

So here come a group of hardy state legislators to try — and not for the first time — to do just that, by imposing a tax on sugary drinks. Representative Kay Khan, who trained as a nurse, has been trying to do this since 2011, and it keeps getting beaten back, as the beverage industry throws up bogus arguments about personal responsibility, nanny-statism, and the specter of Massachusetts residents fleeing to New Hampshire to save a few cents on root beer.

This bill, sponsored by Khan and Santiago, and Senator Jason Lewis, imposes a graduated levy: The more sugar per liquid ounce, the higher the tax. That chocolate milk, $2.49 at my corner store, would cost 14 cents more; the Coke would go from $1.99 to $2.39. And it’s not about just deterrence. Khan and the others estimate that the new taxes would raise $368 million a year, which would then be spent on such things as public education campaigns and better clean water access.

It has worked elsewhere, in Berkeley, Calif., and Mexico, for example, where raising taxes led to lower consumption. What are we waiting for? This may be the year Khan finally makes it happen: There’s talk of including the measure in a big health care bill the House is working on. That would be splendid. Because we’re looking at a crisis here, and it’ll only get worse if we don’t act.

Kicking sugar is hard. People need all the help they can get. Take it from somebody who has been trying, and failing, to go cold turkey for weeks. Damn you, Marshmallow Fluff!

Globe columnist Yvonne Abraham can be reached at yvonne.abraham@globe.com and on Twitter @GlobeAbraham