

# Bad policies are making Americans obese and diabetic



We're doing ourselves in. By every metric, the U.S. is spending far more per capita on healthcare, and lagging behind our peer nations in the developed world in health outcomes. Our actions are actually fueling the pandemic of avertible lifestyle diseases that are killing us:

**We're failing people with diabetes:** Diabetes rates are soaring in this country. What was once dubbed "Adult-onset diabetes" when I was in med school has attained the nondescript moniker "Type 2 diabetes". The reason? Kids have it, too! It's highly correlated with obesity, the deadly spawn of sedentary lifestyle and ultra-processed high glycemic index foods. Type 2 diabetes affects 38 million Americans.

As recently reported in *The Guardian*, Dr. Robert Califf, the Food and Drug Administration commissioner, was invited to keynote the American Diabetes Association annual scientific session. In a shocking turnaround, and an implicit rebuke to his hosts, he castigated them:

*"For the larger epidemic of type 2 diabetes, we're failing them . . . I don't say that lightly."*

The ADA is mostly supported by pharmaceutical companies, dialysis mega-corporations like DaVita, and they even receive substantial grants from the Idaho Potato

Commission and Splenda®.

There's an obvious conflict of interest when companies that stand most to gain from an expanded clientele of diabetics profess to be fighting diabetes.

The ADA's **diet recommendations** have shifted a little in the low-carb direction to urge "less added sugar", but have doubled down on lauding "Quality carbohydrates like starchy vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and low-fat milk".

Nowhere are very low carb or keto diets acknowledged as solutions for the diabetes pandemic. A recent **hushed-up legal settlement** highlights the collusion of ADA with Big Food interests. According to investigative reporter Neil Barsky:

*"A cloak of silence has descended over the recent whistleblower lawsuit claiming that the American Diabetes Association, or ADA, accepted corporate money in return for recommending recipes that threatened the health of people with diabetes . . . For Hanna, accepting a settlement from the ADA was no doubt a simpler and less stressful and risky alternative to a trial, but for me and the country's other 38 million people with diabetes, it is a letdown. What a great opportunity a trial would have been to expose the inner workings of the ADA, the patient advocacy organization up to its eyeballs in big-business funding."*

Meanwhile . . .

**Poor and minorities bear the brunt of amputations:** A subsequent article in *The Guardian* exposes a "mega-disparity" in healthcare delivery: Over 100,000 Americans with diabetes have limbs amputated every year due to diabetes. And there are major inequities in outcomes:

*"Less affluent Americans with diabetes are more four times more likely to have limbs amputated than affluent Americans with diabetes. African Americans are a mind-blowing four times as likely to suffer amputations than white Americans, and three times as likely to suffer from peripheral artery disease (PAD), the diabetes-related condition that impedes blood flow to the limbs."*

The article goes on to profile minority amputees who were surprised to learn that there is an alternative: very low-carb diets. Many learned to control their diabetes and even managed to salvage endangered limbs.

Not so fast, say cereal manufacturers . . .

**The Kelce Brothers Launch "Kelce Mix":** Not content to have had a lucrative football career with the Super Bowl-winning Kansas City Chiefs, Travis Kelce has joined with his brother for a cereal endorsement. Yeah, I know it's tough for a macho guy when you're a mere multi-millionaire and your main squeeze, Taylor Swift, is a billionaire, *but c'mon!*

Kelce Mix is a curated blend of three blood sugar busters: Cinnamon Toast Crunch, Lucky Charms, and a new abomination called Reese's Puffs. It's a bad look when admired athletes cash out while endangering the health of kids who hold them up as role models.

**Medicaid is paying millions for salty, fat-laden "medically-tailored" cheeseburgers and sandwiches:** Nicholas Florko writes for *STAT*:

*"They're marketed as healthy, 'dietitian-approved' meals and delivered directly to the homes of people seriously ill from cancer, diabetes, or heart disease: a Jimmy*

*Dean frozen sausage breakfast sandwich, biscuits and gravy, a cheeseburger. These are among the offerings sold by an Idaho-based company, Homestyle Direct, which is paid millions of dollars each year by taxpayer-funded state Medicaid programs to deliver what the company calls medically tailored meals."*

Homestyle Direct is just one of many companies that are beneficiaries of lucrative government contracts that attempt to address "food insecurity"; as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

**Oh SNAP!** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, was originally designed to address hunger in America. Since the program's inception at the height of the Depression, over-nutrition has supplanted starvation as a major health challenge.

Critics have pointed out that SNAP has devolved into a subsidy for U.S. agribusiness and food conglomerates by enabling the indiscriminate purchase of all manner of sugar-laden and highly-processed junk. SNAP benefits underwrite the buying of soft drinks, candy, ice cream, and prepared desserts such as cakes, pies, cookies and similar products. Some studies suggest that SNAP recipients have a greater propensity to overweight than non-recipients of comparably disadvantaged backgrounds.

Efforts to expand SNAP have been touted as a crown jewel of the government's benevolent safety net; In 2021, the total cost of the U.S. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was around 113.74 billion U.S. dollars—a significant increase from the previous year, when the total cost of SNAP amounted to 79.1 billion U.S. dollars.

Last month, Representative Ron Rosedale (R-MT) introduced the **Ensuring Health in SNAP Act of 2024**: *"The American diet is notoriously known as one of the worst in the world . . . My legislation will empower states to encourage a healthy diet for those that receive SNAP and reduce life threatening eating habits which can lead to chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes. If states want to incentivize healthier behavior, they should be able to set their own policies, not be forced to follow shortsighted orders from USDA bureaucrats."*

SNAP advocates argue that it is unfair to stigmatize poor and minority people by restricting their access to treats their affluent neighbors can afford. That argument doesn't wash with me; there should be no free ride for unhealthy food that sickens people and drives up health care costs borne by taxpayers.

In a fraught election year, in a Congress beset with farm and food industry lobbyists, how likely is it that this laudable initiative will pass?

**Kick Big Soda Out:** Did you enjoy watching the Olympics? Coca-Cola is a major sponsor, and just inked a deal to fund Olympic-related sports tournaments through 2032.

It's great that they support the aspirations of young athletes, but Coke's sponsorship conveys a stealth message, which is one of the main fallacies that sugar purveyors have peddled for decades: Sugar is not a problem, per se; rather, it's *inactivity* that's the culprit. Remember the "Let's Move!" initiative rolled out by Michelle Obama? Also co-sponsored by Coca-Cola.

Athletes are touted as role models for the proposition that "soft drinks, consumed in moderation can be part of a healthy, active lifestyle". But who among us swims thousands of yards, cycles scores of miles, runs dozen of laps around a track, or

lifts truck tire size weights day in and day out? For the average person—even amateur exercisers—soft drinks are a net negative. The Olympics just sugar-coat the deadly truth about calorie-laden sodas.

In response, a petition is to be found at [kickbigsodaout.org](http://kickbigsodaout.org). It states in part:

“Sugary drinks harm people and our planet. By accepting billions from Coca-Cola to sponsor the Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) implicitly endorses a world where health and environmental harms are ‘sports-washed’ away, undermining commitments to use sport to create a better world . . . Children’s exposure to pervasive, unhealthy food marketing is a major risk factor for childhood obesity.”

There’s nothing new about this—it’s consistent with a decades-long effort by Big Sugar to conceal the dangers of sweetened foods and drinks and deflect blame to cholesterol and saturated fats. As documented in a blockbuster 2016 exposé in **JAMA**:

*“ . . . our findings suggest the industry sponsored a research program in the 1960s and 1970s that successfully cast doubt about the hazards of sucrose while promoting fat as the dietary culprit in CHD.”*