

Elections 2024: What the major political parties say about a sugar tax

Today's question to the major political parties deals with the sugar tax. We asked the ANC, DA, EFF, IFP, FF Plus, ActionSA, PA, MK Party, and RISE Mzansi on 13 March 2024 and sent follow-up queries to those who did not respond. Some have still not responded. Answers are very lightly edited for length, grammar and typos.



Source: [Pexels](#)

Diseases associated with diet have become among the biggest burdens of disease in South Africa. What steps, if any, would your party take to regulate the fast food and sugar industries?

ANC: The ANC did not respond to our questions.

DA: The DA will review the health promotion levy's impact and its contribution to improving the population's diets. We remain concerned that this levy has reduced the competitiveness of the local sugar industry and its ability to act as a labour- absorptive industry.

EFF: To regulate the fast food and sugar industries, the EFF government will implement front-of-package nutrition warning labelling on food and beverages high in salts, sugar, and fats, based on unbiased scientific evidence.

However, one of the main problems facing our people when it comes to diet is education and access to primary health care

to obtain the necessary information on healthy food.

We will promote collaboration across departments, allocate resources effectively, and plan budgets accordingly. Additionally, we will engage health practitioners in outreach programs to schools, communities, and workplaces for screening and referrals as needed.

IFP: We agree that our healthcare system is stretched in dealing with many preventable diseases and therefore we would make decisions that are guided by our national health regulatory institutions and research.

FF Plus: Overregulation is not the answer. Primary health care with the focus on preventative care is more important and should include educating people about the risks of high sugar intake, etc.

ActionSA: ActionSA recognises that the lack of access to knowledge about healthy lifestyles, compounded by the impacts of poverty, unemployment, and insufficient access to nutritious food, contribute to the prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes.

Therefore, ActionSA has committed to expanding access through economic opportunities, critical relief grants, and even health-related content in the education curriculum to ensure that children learn about making healthy lifestyle decisions.

PA: We would start by making it compulsory for all fast-food companies to offer genuinely healthy options on their menus, which should also be economically viable, as we don't intend to destroy successful businesses for people. To be viable, these are meals that people should actually want to eat.

Sugar is just one of the many things people over-indulge in. Alcohol, for example, is heavily taxed and regulated, but we still drink far more than we are advised to. Sugar and maize are some of the most affordable items for people to feed their families. If we can solve the poverty problem, that will hopefully allow people to afford better food and more balanced meals too.

MK Party: The MK Party did not respond to our questions.

RISE Mzansi: The sugar tax was an important step towards recognising the state's responsibility to regulate unhealthy food. However, the sugar tax alone is unlikely to combat obesity and other lifestyle diseases.

Specifically, raising the tax on fast food would make the meals more expensive, possibly exacerbating South Africa's hunger problem in the short-term, and is not the right approach to promote nutrition. We should require fast food companies to provide nutritional information on their menus. We should explore public health education on healthy eating, as part of a broader shift in public health towards wellness promotion and illness prevention.

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