

Industry boss calls for alternative to junk food at movie theatres

By Fiachra O Cionnaith

Thursday, March 18, 2010
Irish Examiner

BUCKETS of butter-coated popcorn, litres of fizzy drinks and an array of melt-in-your-mouth chocolates may be central to most cinema trips, but the treat could soon become a thing of the past.

In a move that will cause the blood pressure of film-lovers to rise, one of the industry's most powerful studio bosses has called for the cinema diet to take on a far healthier look.

In an attempt to curb growing obesity levels worldwide, Sony Pictures chairman Michael Lynton has insisted an alternative to popcorn, fizzy drinks and chocolates should be available in multiplexes.

The industry leader has claimed alternatives like granola bars, fruit salad, yoghurt and – heaven forbid – vegetable crudites may soon be stacked where the salty favourites used to reign.

The Sony Pictures chairman told a recent convention of cinema owners in Las Vegas: "I can almost imagine the Romans eating popcorn and drinking Coke at the colosseum 2,000 years ago.

"But by bringing healthier snacks into your concession stands you would be helping to meet an urgent public health need."

The average Irish cinema bucket of popcorn contains 76 grams of fat – the equivalent of six McDonald's cheeseburgers – and 100 calories.

Similarly, a large fizzy drink in Ireland can contain the same amount of calories as two pints of alcohol, with some US multiplexes selling 64 ounce drink "buckets" – 13 times larger than sizes in the 1940s.

According to Prof Donal O'Shea, consultant endocrinologist at St Columcille's Hospital in Dublin and leading obesity expert, 25% of the Irish population is now obese.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Public Health in Ireland has warned that related health conditions like heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high blood pressure are expected to rise by 40% within the next decade.

The situation has become so concerning that even PepsiCo has been convinced to remove its sugary drinks from schools in 200 countries.

However, keen to quell any public backlash, Mr Lynton added: "I'm just talking about adding some healthier items. I don't think giant tubs of spinach or broccoli is a good idea.

"And nobody wants to eat cauliflower or drink a 40 ounce cup of prune juice while watching Spider-Man," he said.