



The Health Consequences of Drinking Soda and Other Sugar-Sweetened Beverages*

Americans drink a lot of sugar. Sugar-sweetened beverages are the primary source of added sugars in the American diet.¹ From 1977 to 2001, Americans nearly tripled their daily intake of calories from sugar-sweetened beverages.² Although consumption has declined recently,³ the average American still consumes 150 calories of sugar-sweetened beverages daily³ and 45 gallons of sugar-sweetened beverages per year.⁴ Every day, approximately 66% of children and 77% of adolescents consume at least one sugar-sweetened beverage,⁵ and 10% of teen caloric intake comes from sugary drinks.³

Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption has been a huge contributor to the obesity epidemic. All lines of scientific evidence indicate a strong link between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and obesity.⁶ From 1977 to 2001, Americans increased their daily calorie consumption by 250–300 calories; 43% of this increase was due to sugar-sweetened beverages.⁶ Because calories in liquid form do not trigger the same sensation of fullness as solid foods, the calories we drink add to those we eat rather than replacing them.⁷ Adults who drink at least one soda per day are 27% more likely to be overweight or obese, regardless of income or ethnicity.⁸

Sugar-sweetened beverages are especially harmful to children. Every additional daily serving of soda increases a child's risk for obesity by 60%,⁹ and children who drink sugar-sweetened beverages are more likely to be overweight or obese later in life.¹⁰ Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption among youth has been linked to increased triglycerides in the blood, which increases risk for cardiovascular disease.^{11,12} In 2008, experts estimated that children would need to reduce their intake by 64 calories per day to meet the *Healthy People 2020* goals for childhood obesity,¹³ which may be achieved by eliminating one sugar-sweetened beverage daily. Drinking sugar-sweetened beverages also compromises the overall quality of a young child's diet;¹⁴ sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is associated with inadequate intake of critical nutrients like calcium, iron, and vitamin A.^{15,16}

Disparities in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption. Latinos and African-Americans are more likely to consume sugar-sweetened beverages on a daily basis compared to whites.⁵ This disparity is influenced by a lack of grocery stores, a high prevalence of convenience stores, and the low cost of sugar-sweetened beverages compared to healthier beverages in many predominantly Latino and African-American communities,^{17,18} along with a long history of soda marketing that targets these communities.¹⁹

Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption increases risk for both diabetes and heart disease. Compared to non-drinkers, individuals who drink 1–2 sugar-sweetened beverages per day have a 26% higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes and a 20% higher risk of developing metabolic syndrome.²⁰ Women who consume one or more servings of sugar-sweetened beverages daily are twice as likely to develop type 2

* **NOTE:** Sugar-sweetened beverages refers to all beverages with added sugars including carbonated soft drinks, juice drinks, sports drinks, flavored and enhanced waters, sweetened teas and energy drinks.



diabetes,²¹ and women who drink more than 2 servings daily have a 40% higher risk of heart disease.²² High levels of fat in the blood, liver, and abdominal region, which increase one's risk for heart disease and diabetes, can develop after very short periods of high sugar-sweetened beverage consumption. After only 2 weeks, young men and women who drink 3 cans of soda daily show a 20% increase in levels of bad cholesterol and triglycerides in the blood.²³ After 6 months, men and women consuming 3 sodas daily display increased cholesterol, visceral fat, and fatty liver.²⁴

Sugar-sweetened beverages damage teeth. Soda consumption nearly doubles the risk of dental caries in children²⁵ and increases the likelihood of cavities in adults.²⁶ The acid in soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages causes erosion of tooth enamel, often after just one sip, and the sugar in these beverages provide fuel for bacteria that cause tooth decay.²⁷

Diet Beverages. Although diet beverages can provide calorie savings if substituted for high-calorie sweetened beverages,²⁸ they are not recommended because they often have high acid content that can harm teeth,¹⁴ and there is some evidence that their sweet taste can stimulate overeating.^{29,30} For children, they displace milk and other healthier options.¹⁴

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