



How **Sugar Sweetened Beverages*** Became a **Leading Contributor** to the **Obesity Epidemic**

It has not been by chance that sugar-sweetened beverage consumption has doubled in the U.S. over the last 30 years.^{1,2} The increase was the result of bold and unrelenting marketing campaigns, increases in portion sizes, concerted efforts to keep prices low, and dramatic expansion of product availability.

- * **Marketing.** Starting with the “soda wars” of the 1970s, Coke and Pepsi began no-holds-barred marketing campaigns, paying the biggest names in sports and entertainment to promote their products. In 2009, the beverage industry spent \$395 million – more than \$1 million per day— on marketing campaigns directed at youth.³ This is the second highest marketing budget for any consumable product.³
- * **Portion Size.** Since the 1950s, sugar-sweetened beverage bottles tripled in size from 6.5 to 20 ounces; fast food restaurants increased their typical portion to 32 ounces (with free refills!); and convenience stores began selling 64-ounce “Big Gulps,” often for less than the price of a 20-ounce bottle.
- * **Price.** The inflation-adjusted price of sugar-sweetened beverages has dropped 35% since the 1980s, compared to an increase of nearly the same amount for fresh fruits and vegetables.⁴ If the price isn’t already low enough, sugar-sweetened beverages are universally highlighted with “super specials” at fast food restaurants, supermarkets, and drug stores.
- * **Product Availability.** An ever expanding array of sugar-sweetened beverages is sold and marketed virtually everywhere: mountains of sale-priced 12-packs at Big Box stores; endless aisles at supermarkets and convenience stores; vending machines in workplaces, parks, fitness clubs, and the mall; and growing placement of refrigerated sales kiosks in places as varied as the local auto parts store, home supply centers, and in the center lane of the gas station.

* **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.*

REFERENCES

¹ Popkin B. Patterns of beverage use across the lifecycle. *Physiol Behav.* 2010;100(1):4-9.

² Kit B, Fakhouri T, Park S, Nielsen S, Ogden C. Trends in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption among youth and adults in the United States: 1999-2010. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.* 2013.

³ Leibowitz J, Rosch J, Ramirez E, Brill J, Ohlhausen M. *A Review of Food Marketing to Children and Adolescents.* Washington, DC; Federal Trade Commission; December 2012. Available at: <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2012/12/121221foodmarketingreport.pdf>.

⁴ Brownell KD, Frieden TR. Ounces of prevention--the public policy case for taxes on sugared beverages. *N Engl J Med.* Apr 30 2009;360(18):1805-1808.