

Sugar-Sweetened Beverages—The Facts

What is a sugar-sweetened beverage?

A sugar-sweetened beverage is a drink with sugar added. Sugar has many names. To find out if a drink contains sugar, look for any of these words on the list of ingredients: sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, honey, invert sugar, molasses, sucrose, syrup or cane sugar.

How much sugar is in sugar-sweetened beverages?

Non-diet sodas, sweetened teas, sports and energy drinks, sweetened waters and juices, and blended coffee drinks contain a lot of sugar. You can get 16 teaspoons of sugar in a single 20-ounce serving.

Can sugar-sweetened beverages make me gain weight?

The calories in these products come from sugar, and consuming extra calories makes you gain weight. More than 10% of the calories kids and adolescents have a day come from sugar-sweetened beverages. Worse yet, sugary drinks add calories that do not fill you up the way food does. Don't drink yourself fat!

Is there a recommended daily intake of added sugar?

You don't need added sugars in your diet at all, but there is a recommended maximum intake. A typical adult diet (2,000 calories per day) should include no more than 130 calories from added sugar. One 20-ounce soda has nearly twice that many calories.

How can I cut back on sugar-sweetened beverages?

Your best bet is to drink water, seltzer or flavored waters with little or no added sugar. Tap water is always a good choice. It's healthful, has no calories and costs nothing. Beware of drinks that claim to be packed with vitamins, antioxidants or other healthful ingredients—they are often loaded with sugar. Read nutrition labels and choose drinks with no more than 25 calories per 8-ounce serving.

If you continue to drink sugary beverages, make them an occasional treat and not a part of your daily diet. Choose a smaller bottle or serving size, such as a 12-ounce can, and order a "small" instead of a "large" at restaurants.

What about diet drinks?

Artificially sweetened diet drinks are low in calories but have little if any nutritional value. They're a good alternative to sugary beverages if you want to avoid weight gain.

My child isn't overweight. Why should I worry about what he or she drinks?

Good nutrition is for everyone, not just for people who are overweight. Sugar-sweetened beverages promote tooth decay and they increase a child's risk of becoming overweight over time. Water and low-fat or fat-free milk are healthier choices.

Do sugar-sweetened drinks cause other problems?

Yes. Women who regularly drink sugar-sweetened beverages have a higher risk of coronary heart disease and diabetes. Gaining weight from these drinks also increases the risk of arthritis and some cancers.

My child's school has stopped offering sugar-sweetened beverages in school vending machines. Isn't that good enough?

Ridding schools of these products helps kids cut down, but most sugar-sweetened drinks are consumed at home. This is true for both adults and children. Put a pitcher of water in your fridge and on your table at all meals. Everyone will benefit.

My kids are really into sports. Don't active kids need sports drinks to stay hydrated?

These drinks are expensive and unnecessary. Water is the best drink for active kids and adults. Keep water on hand before, during and after activities.

I don't drink sugary beverages, only 100% juice. That's healthy, right?

Fruit juice is more nutritious than sugar-sweetened fruit drinks, but it's packed with calories from the natural sugars found in fruit. Limit your intake to no more than six ounces daily, the amount in an old-fashioned juice glass. Or dilute juice with water or seltzer to cut down on calories and sugar. As a rule, it's better to eat your fruit than drink it.

Why should anyone decide what I can eat or drink?

You can eat and drink what you like—we just want you to have all the facts. The beverage industry spends billions of dollars marketing products to children and adults. Consumers deserve to know that these heavily-advertised beverages are the largest single driver of the obesity epidemic, and that there are healthy alternatives.

Isn't lack of exercise the real cause of obesity?

Exercise is essential to good health, but calories are the main culprit in weight gain. And controlling your calories is easier than consuming too many and then trying to burn them off. A typical adult needs 27 minutes of brisk walking to burn off the calories in a single 12-ounce can of soda, 46 minutes to burn off a 20-ouncer. So skip the soda and take the same walk. Your body will thank you in more ways than one.