

# Making Healthy Beverage Choices:

## What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

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Many of us are aware we need to make healthy food choices. We know to choose vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free milk and lean-protein foods. Many do not realize that making healthy food choices also includes paying attention to what we drink.



Drinking four  
12-ounce sodas  
a day adds 576  
to 737 calories just  
from sugary  
beverages.

A large amount of calories may come from the things we drink. Certain drinks, such as regular soda, energy and sport drinks, and alcoholic beverages, provide extra calories with little nutrients. When we drink too many of these drinks, it is easy to go over our limit for calories without getting the nutrients we need.

A 12-ounce soda normally contains 36 to 46 grams of sugar or 144 to 184 calories. When you drink four 12-ounce sodas a day, you add 576 to 737 calories from only sugar-sweetened beverages. Drinking four 12-ounce sodas a day can add five to six pounds a month. Cutting back on sugar-sweetened beverages can play an important role in weight reduction.

### Sugary Drinks

A sugar-sweetened beverage is one sweetened with various forms of calorie-adding sugars.

Some examples are:

- Sodas
- Lemonade and fruit drinks
- Sports drinks
- Sweetened iced tea
- Sweetened coffee drinks
- Energy drinks
- Sweetened bottled water

Even flavored milk and 100 percent juices can be counted as sugar-sweetened beverages if too many are consumed. A product containing 100 percent juices provides several nutrients, but it also contains sugar present in the fruit. Some juices even have added sugar. It is recommended that only 6 ounces of 100 percent fruit juice be consumed daily as a way to limit the intake of sugar. A good practice is to eat the fruit rather than drink the juice.

### Drinking Too Much Sugar

High consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is linked to obesity, due to the high sugar

content and calories in these drinks. Some evidence suggests that the body does not respond to the calories in beverages the same way it responds to calories in food. Your body may not register the calories you drink so you may consume more calories than you need.

Added sugar from sugar-sweetened beverages increases the risk of heart disease. The extra calories from the sugar in these drinks raises LDL (the bad cholesterol that clogs the arteries) and lowers HDL (the good cholesterol that removes bad cholesterol from the arteries). A high level of LDL in the blood increases the risk for heart disease. One study showed that individuals who consume at least one soft drink a day increase their chance of having high blood pressure. Strong evidence also shows high soft-drink intake is linked to lower intake of valuable nutrients and lower overall health.

It is important to be aware of your intake of sugar-sweetened beverage as it may affect your health. When a person consumes too many sugar sweetened beverages, the possibility exists that these drink are replacing healthy choices such as low-fat milk and fat-free milk and water.

### **How Much Sugar May We Drink?**

Few of us, except for those physically active to the level of athletes, meet our nutrient needs with room for extra calories from added sugar.

For example, if you drink one 12-ounce soda, it will take you 20 minutes of jogging to burn off the 184 calories. To burn off the 512 calories in the super-size soda you purchase at convenient store, you would have to play basketball vigorously (without stopping) for one hour and 15 minutes or swim freestyle laps for one hour.

The average American consumes about 22 teaspoons of sugar per day, more than three times the recommended six teaspoons for women and more than twice the nine teaspoons recommended for men. One 20-ounce soda has 16 to 18 teaspoons of sugar. A 20-ounce bottle of cranberry juice cocktail has 20 teaspoons of sugar. If we are to stay with the recommendations for sugar we have to limit these drinks and other sources of added sugar in the diet, such as candies, cakes, and pastries.

### **Sugar by Another Name**

It is easy to identify a food that contains brown or granulated sugar, honey, or corn syrup. Some other forms of sugar, such as liquid fructose, fruit juice concentrates, dextrose, and maltose may not be as easy to detect.

When looking at the ingredients to check for added sugars, look for the word “syrup” and words ending in “-ose.” These are most likely added sugars.

## **Making Wise Beverage Choices**

Beverages such as fat-free and low-fat milk and 100 percent fruit juices provide vitamins and minerals along with the calories they contain. Choosing water and unsweetened beverages such as coffee and tea can provide water the body needs without adding calories.

### **Coffee Drinks and Sweet Tea**

Most specialty drinks have more than 250 calories. You can enjoy these beverages if you take some of these steps to reduce the amount of calories:

- Order plain coffee or tea.
- Do not add syrup.
- Use fat-free milk.
- Get a smaller size.
- Leave out the whipped topping.
- Use sugar-free sweeteners.

### **Juices**

One glass of orange juice (8 ounce) has 122 calories. Use in moderation.

- Limit 100 percent juice intake to 6 ounces a day.
- Eat fresh fruit instead of drinking the juice.

### **Sports Drinks**

Sports drinks can contain up to 250 calories in 32 ounce. They are high in sugar and carbohydrates.

- Use water to quench your thirst instead.
- Have low-calorie sports drinks instead.



### **Energy Drinks**

Energy drinks contain as much as 60 grams of sugar per container—that is, 240 calories. In addition, these drinks are high in caffeine. Some may contain as much as 300 mg. Some research shows that caffeine intake up to 400 mg in healthy adults is not associated with harmful effects. However, if an individual drinks two or more energy drinks in a day, they can easily go over this limit. Children and adolescents should limit their intake of caffeine to 100 mg per day. Drinking even one energy drink could put them over the limit. Energy drinks may have serious life threatening effects in individuals who are sensitive to caffeine and who have pre-existing health conditions.

- Avoid energy drinks.
- Choose balanced proportions of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats to boost energy.
- Make water your drink of choice.

### **Alcohol**

Alcohol contains 7 calories per gram. A glass of regular beer or wine contains just over 100 calories. Cocktails with added sweet mixes, cream liqueur, and coconut mix quickly add hundreds of calories.

- Choose lighter drinks such as vodka with club soda.
- Drink light beer instead of regular beer.
- Use alcohol in moderation.

### **Regular Soda**

Soda has no nutrients; it is like liquid candy. A 50-ounce or

“extra-large” cola contains 400 calories.

- Choose diet instead of regular soda.
- Downsize your drink.
- Share your drink with someone.
- Choose water or unsweetened juice.

### **Water**

Let water be your drink of choice. Ways to get more water in your diet include:

- Serve water with your meals.
- Carry a bottle of water with you.
- Add slices of fresh fruit to your water.
- Choose water at restaurants.

### **Summary**

- Sugar-sweetened beverages provide excess calories and few essential nutrients to the diet and should only be consumed when nutrient needs have been met and without exceeding daily calorie limits.
- Making wise beverage choices means choosing to drink water and other beverages with few or no calories and the recommended amount of low-fat milk and 100 percent fruit juices.
- Research suggests a very strong link to sweetened beverage such as soda and specialty coffee drinks with obesity.
- Food choices as well as beverage choices contribute to our calorie needs. The amount of calories we need varies based on a person’s age, gender, height, weight, and level of activity.

For more information on choosing healthy beverages, visit <http://www.extension.org/pages/19894/a-day-of-beverages-make-good-choices>.

## References

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