



What Soft Drinks are Doing to Your Body

By Dr. Maoshing Ni, Yahoo! Health Expert for Alternative Medicine - Fri, Oct 30, 2009 – pg 1 of 3

Soda, pop, cola, soft drink — whatever you call it, it is one of the worst beverages that you could be drinking for your health. As the debate for whether to put a tax on the sale of soft drinks continues, you should know how they affect your body so that you can make an informed choice on your own.

Soft drinks are hard on your health

Soft drinks contain little to no vitamins or other essential nutrients. However, it is what they *do* contain that is the problem: caffeine, carbonation, simple sugars — or worse, sugar substitutes — and often food additives such as artificial coloring, flavoring, and preservatives.

A lot of research has found that consumption of soft drinks in high quantity, especially by children, is responsible for many health problems that include tooth decay, nutritional depletion, obesity, type-2 diabetes, and heart disease.

Why the sugar in soft drinks isn't so sweet

Most soft drinks contain a high amount of simple sugars. The USDA recommendation of sugar consumption for a 2,000-calorie diet is a daily allotment of 10 teaspoons of added sugars. Many soft drinks contain *more* than this amount!

Just why is too much sugar so unhealthy? Well, to start, let's talk about what happens to you as sugar enters your body. When you drink sodas that are packed with simple sugars, the pancreas is called upon to produce and release insulin, a hormone that empties the sugar in your blood stream into all the tissues and cells for usage. The result of overindulging in simple sugar is raised insulin levels. Raised blood insulin levels beyond the norm can lead to depression of the immune system, which in turn weakens your ability to fight disease.

Something else to consider is that most of the excess sugar ends up being stored as fat in your body, which results in weight gain and elevates risk for heart disease and cancer. One study found that when subjects were given refined sugar, their white blood cell count decreased significantly for several hours afterwards. Another study discovered that rats fed a high-sugar diet had a substantially elevated rate of breast cancer when compared to rats on a regular diet.

The health effects of diet soda

You may come to the conclusion that diet or sugar-free soda is a better choice. However, one study discovered that drinking one or more soft drinks a day — and it didn't matter whether it was diet or regular — led to a 30% greater chance of weight gain around the belly.



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Diet soda is filled with artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, sucralose, or saccharin. These artificial sweeteners pose a threat to your health. Saccharin, for instance, has been found to be carcinogenic, and studies have found that it produced bladder cancer in rats.

Aspartame, commonly known as nutrasweet, is a chemical that stimulates the brain to think the food is sweet. It breaks down into aspartic acid, phenylalanine, and methanol at a temperature of 86 degrees. (Remember, your stomach is somewhere around 98 degrees.) An article put out by the University of Texas found that aspartame has been linked to obesity. The process of stimulating the brain causes more cravings for sweets and leads to carbohydrate loading.

Carbonation depletes calcium

Beverages with bubbles contain phosphoric acid, which can severely deplete the blood calcium levels; calcium is a key component of the bone matrix. With less concentration of calcium over a long time, it can lower deposition rates so that bone mass and density suffer. This means that drinking sodas and carbonated water increases your risk of osteoporosis.

Add in the caffeine usually present in soft drinks, and you are in for even more trouble. Caffeine can deplete the body's calcium, in addition to stimulating your central nervous system and contributing to stress, a racing mind, and insomnia.

Skip the soda and go for:

- Fresh water

Water is a vital beverage for good health. Each and every cell needs water to perform its essential functions. Since studies show that tap water is filled with contaminants, antibiotics, and a number of other unhealthy substances, consider investing in a quality carbon-based filter for your tap water.

On the go? Try using a stainless steel thermos or glass bottle, filled with filtered water. Enhance the flavor of your water with a refreshing infusion of basil, mint leaves, and a drop of honey.

- Fruit Juice

If you are a juice drinker, try watering down your juice to cut back on the sugar content. Buy a jar of organic 100% juice, especially cranberry, acai, pomegranate, and then dilute three parts water to one part juice. You will get a subtle sweet taste and the benefit of antioxidants. After a couple of weeks, you will no longer miss the sweetness of sugary concentrated juices.



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- Tea

Tea gently lifts your energy and has numerous health benefits. Black, green, white, and oolong teas all contain antioxidant polyphenols. In fact, tea ranks as high or higher than many fruits and vegetables on the ORAC scale, the score that measures antioxidant potential of plant-based foods.

Herbal tea does not have the same antioxidant properties, though it is still a great beverage choice with other health benefits, such as inducing calming and relaxing effects.

If tea doesn't satisfy your sweet tooth, try adding cinnamon or a little honey, which has important health benefits that refined sugar lacks. Drink up!

I hope you find the ways and means to avoid soft drinks. I invite you to visit often and share your own personal health and longevity tips with me.

May you live long, live strong, and live happy!

--Dr. Mao