

Sugary Drinks and Childhood Obesity

This month's *Archives* focuses on new research about childhood obesity. Being overweight is now the most common medical condition of childhood. Nearly 1 of every 3 children is at risk of being overweight. Complications of obesity include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and many other health and social problems.

Type 2 diabetes mellitus is the most common form of diabetes. In type 2 diabetes, either the body does not make enough insulin or the body's cells ignore the insulin. Insulin is necessary for the body to be able to use glucose for energy.

One research study in this month's *Archives* found that children who reduced sugar by the equivalent of 1 can of soda per day had improved glucose and insulin levels. This means that by eliminating 1 can of soda per day you can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes in your child, regardless of any other diet or exercise changes. Another study found that increased amounts of sugary drinks were associated with increased blood pressure, blood glucose levels, waist circumference, and body mass index (BMI) and decreased high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol levels ("good cholesterol").



TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF SUGARY DRINKS

- Fruitades: lemonade, limeade, Gatorade
- Fruit drinks: Hi-C, Hawaiian Punch, Kool-Aid
- Soda: Coke, Pepsi, 7UP, Mountain Dew
- Energy drinks: Red Bull, Rockstar, Monster

THERE ARE SO MANY FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OBESITY, WHY ARE SUGARY DRINKS A BIG DEAL?

Sugary drinks are the main source of added sugar in the daily diet of children. The main nutrient in sugary drinks is high-fructose corn syrup; each 12-oz serving of soda has the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of sugar. Between 56% and 85% of children in school have at least 1 can of soda every day.

Sugary drinks provide a lot of calories very quickly. These drinks are a particular problem because it is easy to consume more than your body needs before your body has a chance to signal that it is full, like it does when you eat solid food. Also, these drinks are typically additions to a regular diet, providing calories that are not needed by the body.

WHICH CHILDREN DRINK THE MOST SODA?

Adolescent males have the highest rates of soda ingestion; 20% of male teens have 4 or more servings each day.

POTENTIAL HEALTH PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH INTAKE OF SWEETENED DRINKS

1. Being overweight or obese because of additional calories in the diet. Each 12-oz soda consumed daily has been associated with a 60% increase in risk of obesity.
2. Drinking sugary drinks instead of milk, resulting in low calcium levels and increased risks of osteoporosis (weak bones) and fractures.
3. Dental problems, including cavities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Eliminate sugary drinks at home. Just don't buy them. Replace with water, milk, or real fruit/vegetable juices. Encourage your child to drink lots of water.
2. Offer healthy eating choices at home, including healthy snacks.
3. Remember: Small changes every day can lead to success.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sources: <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;113/1/152> and http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/childhood/contributing_factors.htm.

Additional reading: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/children/index.htm>.

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and other Advice for Patients articles, go to the Advice for Patients link on the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* Web site at <http://archpediatrics.com>.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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