



## Frequently Asked Questions About Sugar Sweetened Beverages

### **Is bottled water a healthier choice than tap water?**

Not necessarily. A four-year review of the bottled water industry concluded that just because water comes out of a bottle, there is no assurance that it is any cleaner or safer than water from the tap. In fact, about 25 percent or more of bottled water is really just *tap water in a bottle*—sometimes it is treated further and sometimes it is not. In addition, bottled water is not as rigorously regulated as tap water and—unlike water from the tap—often lacks fluoride, which is essential for dental health. Finally, bottled water costs considerably more than the water that comes from your tap.

### **Is diet soda better than regular soda?**

Diet soda does not contain the sugar and calories that regular soda does, but it is still not considered a healthy drink alternative. Although most of the artificial sweeteners used in diet sodas have been deemed safe (see below), diet sodas, like regular sodas, provide no nutritive value and also contain phosphoric acid, an ingredient that could increase the risk of bone loss later in life. Diet sodas have a sweeter taste than regular soda so over time your taste buds increase your taste for sweet drinks and sweet foods. Diet soda should be a transition from regular soda to healthier beverages like water, unsweetened teas and low-fat milk.

### **Are artificial sweeteners safe?**

Artificial sweeteners are widely used to reduce or replace the sugar in foods and drinks while keeping the taste and reducing the calories. Based on years of research, the Food and Drug Administration and other agencies worldwide find that most artificial sweeteners are safe. Common sweeteners include: Equal® or Nutrasweet® (aspartame) in the blue packet; Splenda® (sucralose) in the yellow packet and Sweet N Low® (saccharin) in the pink packet. Artificial sweeteners should be used to as recommended by health care providers for individuals with diabetes or for those who are reducing their weight.

### **Is the high fructose corn syrup used to sweeten sodas and other beverages a problem?**

High fructose corn syrup flooded the American food supply in the early 1980s, about the same time as the unprecedented rise in obesity rates. Some researchers believe that high fructose corn syrup may have different metabolic effects in the body than other sugars and as a result, corn sweeteners have been accused of being major contributors to the nation's obesity epidemic. However, most experts believe that the real problem with high fructose corn syrup is that it is an especially inexpensive and ever-present form of sugar. High fructose corn syrup is pervasive in the food supply and we are eating too much of it in the form of empty calories in ever-increasing portion sizes.

### **Are energy drinks a healthy beverage option?**

“Energy drink” is a term created by the beverage industry. Energy drinks are not considered to be healthy as they contain extremely large amounts of sugar and caffeine, along with some vitamins and herbal ingredients. Examples of energy drinks include Red Bull and Rockstar. These beverages are not recommended for children and adolescents because they may cause an elevation in blood pressure.

**Does carbonated or sparkling water impact our health?** If consumed in large amounts (six or more servings per day) the phosphoric acid used to carbonate beverages can reduce calcium levels and lead to a higher risk of bone loss. However, in moderation, carbonation does not impact health.

### **Are sports drinks, electrolyte replacement drinks, and vitamin waters healthy beverage options?**

Sports drinks and electrolyte replacement drinks can be healthy options for people participating in endurance events, which engage vigorous physical activity for one hour or more, to increase liquid intake, replace electrolytes and provide energy. Most people, however, do not need sports drinks since regular food and beverage intake is sufficient to replace electrolytes lost during moderate physical activity. Vitamin waters are made with distilled water, fructose, electrolytes and vitamins, and some varieties may also contain caffeine. Like sports drinks and electrolyte replacement drinks, vitamin waters are not unhealthy, but can be expensive and are not necessary if one eats a well-balanced diet and is adequately hydrated with plain water.

### **What is the difference between the sugar in candy and the sugar in fruit?**

There is an important distinction between the sugar in candy and the sugar in fruit. Foods like candy are high in *added sugar*—which refers to any type of sugar that has been added during the processing of a food or beverage— and these foods supply *empty calories*—which means they have few nutrients but lots of calories. Fruits also contain sugar but unlike candy, the sugar is naturally occurring (already part of the food) and it contains nutrients (vitamins, minerals, fiber, etc.) that are an important part of a healthy diet.

### **Is honey healthier than sugar?**

Honey is not healthier than sugar because both sweeteners are made from the same two sugar molecules, and both contain about the same amount of calories per serving.

### **Why are low-fat foods so high in sugar?**

In low-fat or fat-free foods, manufacturers often replace the fat with sugar to maintain the product's taste and texture. Recent studies indicate that people actually eat *28% more calories* when they eat low-fat foods!

### **Does sugar cause diabetes?**

Eating excessive amounts of sugar does not cause diabetes directly. Many factors are involved in developing diabetes, some of which include genetics, being overweight, and lack of exercise. Excess sugar intake may contribute to weight gain which may in turn contribute to the development of type II diabetes.

### **How does juice compare to soda?**

100% fruit juices may have about as many calories as sodas and other sweetened soft drinks, but they also contain vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and some fiber. It is best to limit the intake of fruit juice and instead eat more whole fruits because they retain all their nutrients and are more filling than juice.

### **Does soda make people fat?**

Regular, nondiet sodas and other sugar-sweetened beverages contribute to weight gain and to the growing obesity epidemic. Sodas contain about 140–150 calories (all from sugar) in a 12 oz. can. By adding just one can of regular soda a day to one's diet, everything else being equal, the average person will gain 15 pounds in a year. Even for people who are not watching their weight, there is no reason to fill up on “empty” calories from soda.

### **Does soda harm teeth?**

All sugary foods, including sodas, can cause tooth decay, especially if they are consumed frequently and without regular brushing.

*Adapted from materials developed by The Alameda County Public Health Department and BANPAC.*

