



Sugar-Sweetened Beverages, Obesity, and Chronic Disease Fact Sheet

What are Sugar-Sweetened Beverages?

- Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) include any beverage to which a caloric sweetener (any type of sugar) has been added.
- These beverages include: soda, other carbonated soft drinks, juice drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened milk or milk alternatives, and sweetened tea or coffee drinks.
- Most sugar-sweetened beverages add calories without providing any nutritional benefit.
- A typical 20-ounce soda contains about 16 teaspoons of sugar and 250 calories.
 - To burn off these calories, the average adult would have to walk at a brisk pace for 45 minutes.

How much sugar do we drink?

- Americans consume about 250–300 more calories daily than several decades ago.¹
- In 2009, the average American ate an estimated 93 pounds of added sugar.² Soda, energy drinks and sports drinks were the largest source of these sugars in 2006. In fact, sweetened beverages accounted for half of the added sugars that Americans consumed.³
- Half of Americans consume a sugar-sweetened beverage on a given day.⁴
- In Boston, 28% of public high school students reported drinking one or more sodas daily. This does not include consumption of other SSBs such as energy drinks and sports drinks. (2007 and 2009 data combined).⁵
- The American Heart Association recommends that the *maximum* daily intake of added sugars be 100 calories (6 teaspoons) for women, but women consume 94 calories from sugar-sweetened beverages alone. Teenage girls consume 171 calories a daily from SSBs daily.
- The recommended maximum intake of added sugars for men is 150 calories (9 teaspoons) a day, but men consume 175 calories from sugar-sweetened beverages drinks alone. Teenage boys consume 273 calories a day from these beverages, nearly twice the recommended consumption of added sugar from all sources.^{6,7}
- People don't compensate for consuming calories through beverages by eating less solid food, probably because fluids don't contribute to a feeling of 'fullness'.⁸ So SSBs are an added layer of extra calories, with no associated nutritional value.
- A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy products provides sufficient daily calories. Added sugar is not necessary for health.
- The beverage industry spent over \$3 billion in 2006 in the US to promote consumption of carbonated beverages, such as soda. Of this, almost \$500 million was youth-directed marketing.⁹

What is the health impact of SSB consumption?

- Numerous studies indicate that higher intake of SSBs leads to an increased risk of gaining weight¹⁰ and also of developing type 2 diabetes,¹¹ heart disease,¹² metabolic syndrome,¹³ hypertension,¹⁴ and gout.¹⁵
- Several large meta-analyses have found that SSB intake was significantly associated with weight gain and obesity.^{16,17} Studies funded by the food industry have reported significantly smaller health impact of SSB consumption than non-industry-funded studies.

- A large meta-analysis found that adults with highest intakes of SSBs were 26% more likely to develop diabetes and 20% more likely to develop metabolic syndrome than those with the lowest intakes.¹⁸
- Women who drink one or more SSB daily had almost twice the risk of developing diabetes as those who drank less than one SSB daily.¹⁹
- Among adults, for each additional SSB consumed daily, blood pressure was significantly higher, even when adjusting for body mass index.²⁰
- A child's risk of becoming obese increased 60% with every additional SSB consumed daily.²¹
- Young children who drank carbonated SSBs had almost double the risk of dental caries.^{22,23}

How much of a problem is obesity in Boston and the US?

- In 2010, 56% of Boston adults were obese (21%) or overweight (35%)²⁴.
- Black residents (33%) and Latino residents (25%) in Boston experience nearly double the obesity prevalence of White residents (16%).²⁵ Communities of color are exposed to more advertising of obesity-promoting activities and food, including sugar-sweetened beverages.²⁶
- 40% of Boston Public School students are overweight or obese.²⁷
- In the past thirty years, US obesity prevalence has doubled among adults²⁸ and tripled among children.²⁹

What is the impact of type-2 diabetes in Boston and the US?

- The increase in type-2 diabetes, a disease where the body cannot properly regulate blood sugar, is closely connected to the obesity epidemic. Type-2 diabetes can be dangerous if undetected or poorly controlled, leading to blindness, kidney failure, lower limb amputation, heart attack, stroke, impotence, and premature death.
- In 2008, six percent of Boston adults reported having diabetes.³⁰
- In 2008, 13% of obese Boston adults reported having diabetes, compared to just 2% of normal or underweight adults.
- Like many diseases, diabetes especially affects people of color. The 2008 diabetes-related death rate for Black residents was nearly three times the rate for White residents, while the rate for Latino residents was more than twice the rate for White residents.³¹ More than 90% of these deaths are preventable, and reduction of SSB's is one of the important steps to take.

How does the obesity epidemic affect everyone?

- Annual medical costs for an obese patient are more than \$1400 higher than for a patient at a healthy weight.
- In 2008, obesity-related health care costs were \$147 billion, more than 9% of all medical costs. About half of these costs were paid through public expenditures.³²

What are strategies to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption?

- A policy change in Boston Public Schools that restricted the sale of sugar-sweetened beverages resulted in significant reductions in the consumption of these beverages.³³
- Two studies in Boston hospital cafeterias have demonstrated that pricing, education, and/or labeling strategies lead to decreased purchases of sugar-sweetened beverages.^{34, 35}

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