

GET THE FACTS: Sugary Drink Consumption

Sugary drinks include regular soda, fruit drinks with less than 100% juice, sweetened water, sports and energy drinks, and coffees and teas with added sugars.^{1,2}

- ▶ Diet drinks, alcohol, coffee, and teas without added sugars and flavored milks that contain 50% dairy or more are usually not considered sugary drinks.³
- ▶ On average, US adults and children consume nearly 150 calories a day from sugary drinks, or about 6-12% of their daily caloric needs.^{2,4}

Sugary drinks account for nearly half of the total added sugars in a typical American diet.¹ About half of adults and over 60% of kids consume a sugary drink on any given day.²⁻⁵

- ▶ Despite some decline in consumption in recent years, both adults and kids in the US continue to consume more sugary drinks and added sugars than recommended.^{1,6,7} Sugary drinks are often cheaper than bottled water, making them an attractive option when tap water is not safe to drink.^{8,9}
- ▶ Beverage companies focus advertising^{10,11} and retail marketing¹² efforts on African Americans and Hispanic Americans, as well as on children.¹³
- ▶ Research shows that African Americans and Hispanic Americans drink more sugary drinks compared to non-Hispanic White Americans.^{4,14,15} Among households with young children, those with lower incomes purchased more sweetened fruit drinks compared to households with higher incomes.¹⁶

There is strong evidence suggesting that drinking too many sugary drinks substantially increases the risk of gaining excess weight and obesity,^{17,18} and developing chronic diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, tooth decay, and cavities.¹⁹⁻²²





Experts recommend drinking water instead of sugary drinks.²³ There are many ways to make drinking water more available:

- ▶ At home:
 - ✓ Be a model to kids by limiting or eliminating your own consumption of sugary drinks.
 - ✓ Offer drinking water or other non-sugary options.
- ▶ At school:
 - ✓ Teach students about the amount of sugar in common beverages and the importance of reducing intake for improved health outcomes.^{24,25}
 - ✓ Implement federal food and beverage standards that prohibit sales of unhealthy options like sugary drinks in schools.^{26,27}
 - ✓ Increase access to and promotion of free, safe drinking water in schools.²⁸
- ▶ In your city, county, or state:
 - ✓ Limit sales of sugary drinks on city property.²⁹
 - ✓ Create healthier out-of-school time environments by training staff to adopt a healthy beverage policy in their programs.^{30,31}
 - ✓ Implement a sugary drink excise tax to discourage consumption, as many US jurisdictions have successfully done.^{32,33} This is projected to be a cost-saving strategy that can improve population health and health equity.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

See the list of references for this fact sheet: www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/priority-areas/sugary-drinks/sugary-drink-consumption-fact-sheet

The following additional resources may be useful:

- The CHOICES Project has evaluated the potential impact on health and health equity that a sugary drink excise tax could have in Hawaii, Minnesota, Denver, Utah, California, New York City, and New York state. Learn more: <https://choicesproject.org/choices-map>
- Sugary Drinks. Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Available at: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/priority-areas/sugary-drinks>
- Carter J, Wiecha JL, Peterson KE, Nobrega S, Gortmaker SL. Lesson 19: Pass the Sugar. In: Planet Health: An Interdisciplinary Curriculum for Teaching Middle School Nutrition and Physical Activity (Second Edition). Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics; 2007. Available at: https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/84/2022/12/Planet-Health-Lesson_19.pdf
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <https://health.gov/our-work/food-nutrition/previous-dietary-guidelines/2015>
- Sugar Toolkit Overview: Why take on sugar? Healthy Food America. Available at www.healthyfoodamerica.org/sugartoolkit_overview
- Consensus Statement: Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood - Recommendations from Key National Health and Nutrition Organizations. September 2019. Healthy Eating Research. Available at <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/HER-HealthyBeverage-ConsensusStatement.pdf>

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Childhood Obesity Intervention
Cost-Effectiveness Study

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