

Just the Facts: Sugary Drinks



Sugary drinks, also known as sugar-sweetened beverages, are the leading source of added sugar and one of the leading sources of calories in Americans' diets. Nearly 40 percent of all added sugars come from sugary beverages.¹ The *2015-2020 U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans*² and the World Health Organization³ recommend reducing added sugars consumption to no more than 10 percent of calories, or 200 calories per day for a 2,000 calorie diet. Currently, children ages 9-18 consume 17 percent of calories from added sugars,⁴ contributing to overweight and obesity and increasing long-term cancer risk.

The American Cancer Society's nutrition and physical activity guidelines for cancer prevention recommend reducing consumption of added sugars and sugary drinks, in particular.⁵

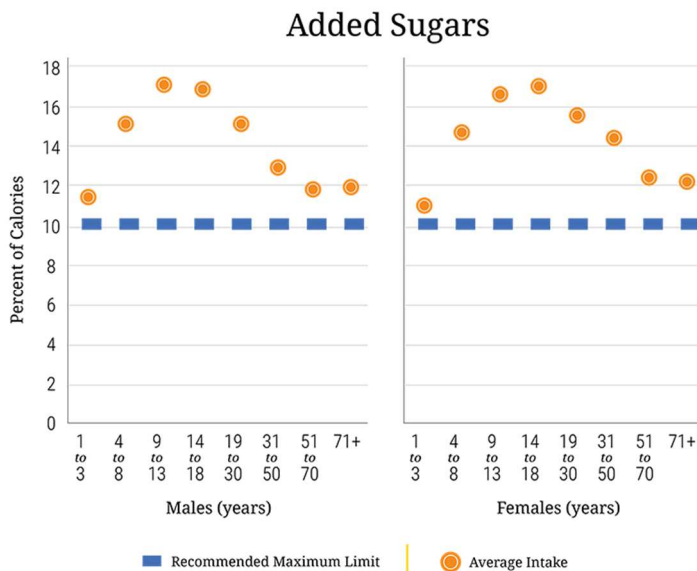
One-half of the population ages 2 and older consumes sugary drinks on any given day. That number increases to 65 percent for boys aged 2-19.⁶

Trends in Consumption of Sugary Drinks

Sugary drinks include regular soda, fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweet teas, and any other non-alcoholic beverage with added caloric sweeteners. Beverages with naturally-occurring sugars, such as 100 percent fruit and vegetable juice, or beverages with non-caloric sweeteners, such as diet soft drinks, are not considered sugary drinks.

About 50 percent of the population consumes sugary drinks on any given day, with about 10 percent of youth consuming three or more.^{7,8} Males consume more calories from sugary drinks than females of the same age, with consumption increasing with age in childhood and decreasing with age in adulthood. Consumption also differs by race and ethnicity and income.

Average Intake of Added Sugars Per Day, Compared with Recommended Limit

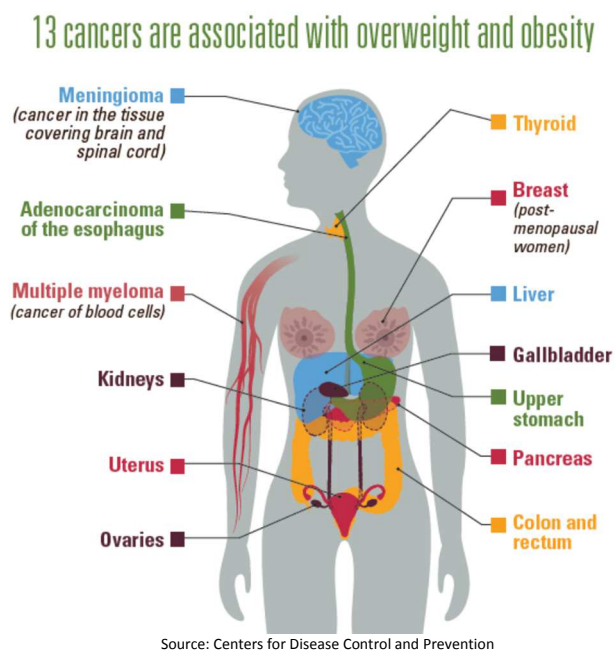


Source: U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015-2020

Health Risks of Sugary Drink Consumption

Sugary drink consumption is directly linked to diabetes⁹, cardiovascular disease¹⁰, dental cavities¹¹, weight gain,^{12, 13, 14} and excess body weight. A recent review of 32 studies found that an increase of one daily serving of sugary drinks was associated with weight gain over a one-year period in both children and adults.¹⁵ When children reduced their consumption of sugary drinks, weight gain was reduced, particularly for overweight children.¹⁶ Additionally, consumption of sugary drinks is associated with overall poor diet quality, including higher intakes of refined grains and lower intakes of fruits and vegetables.¹⁷ Sugary drinks increase total caloric intake without providing any nutrients to improve health or reduce the risk of disease. In addition, when calories are consumed as beverages people do not feel as full.¹⁸

Sugary drinks are related to cancer risk in their association with excess body weight. Approximately 20 percent of all cancers are caused by poor diet, physical inactivity, excess body weight and excess alcohol consumption.¹⁹ In fact, excess body weight is clearly associated with an increased risk of developing at least 13 cancers, including cancers of the breast (postmenopausal), colon and rectum, uterus, kidney, pancreas, ovary, liver, gastric cardia, gallbladder, and thyroid, and adenocarcinoma of the esophagus, meningioma and multiple myeloma.²⁰ Excess body weight also increases the risk for cancer recurrence and decreases the likelihood of surviving several cancers.²¹



Obesity rates have doubled among adults and tripled among children in the U.S in recent decades. While rates appear to have stabilized in the last few years, currently 32 percent of youth ages 2-19²² and 71 percent of adults²³ are overweight or obese.²⁴ One study concluded that consumption of sugary drinks accounts for 20 percent of the weight gain in the U.S. from 1997 to 2007.²⁵

The American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Surgeon General and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend reducing consumption of sugary drinks as a critical strategy to reduce overweight and obesity and prevent numerous diseases, including many common types of cancer.

The Solution

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) supports a broad range of evidence-based strategies to reduce cancer incidence and death in the U.S. by reducing excess body weight and fostering healthy behaviors through healthy eating and active living environments for all Americans. In particular, ACS CAN supports evidence-based strategies to reduce the consumption of sugary drinks and improve the overall nutritional quality of the American diet. This may include adding an excise tax on sugary drinks, removing sugary drinks as the default option for kids' restaurant meals, removing sugary drinks from government-owned vending machines and cafeterias, adding information about added sugars to nutrition labels, and providing alternatives to sugary drinks in schools.

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