

Sweetened beverage consumption increases in the US

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Over the past two decades, the number of adults consuming sugar-sweetened beverages such as soft drinks, fruit drinks and punches has increased dramatically, according to a study led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Researchers examined changes over the past two decades in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption based on nationally representative survey data, and found that sugar-sweetened beverages comprise a significant source of total daily beverage intake and are the largest source of beverage calories consumed daily. Their results are published in the January 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

"More adults are drinking sugar-sweetened beverages and, among those drinkers, consumption has increased," said Sara N. Bleich, PhD, lead author of the study and assistant professor with the Bloomberg School's Department of Health Policy and Management. "From 1988 to 2004, the percentage of sugar-sweetened beverage drinkers increased five percent. Per capita consumption of energy from sugar-sweetened beverages increased 46 kilocalories (kcal) per day, and daily sugar-sweetened beverage consumption among drinkers increased 6 ounces per day."

The study also examined trends in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption by age, race/ethnicity and weight loss intention. Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption was highest among young adults (231-289 kcal/day), who consumed roughly 20 percent of their sugar-sweetened beverage calories at work, and lowest among the elderly (68-83 kcal/day). Among race/ethnicity groups, the percentage of sugar-

sweetened beverage drinkers and per capita consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages was highest among blacks followed by Mexican Americans. Overweight/obese adults who were trying to lose weight were less likely to drink sugar-sweetened beverages compared to those who were not, but they still consumed a considerable amount from 1999 to 2004 (278 kcal/day).

Using dietary data collected in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (1988 to 1994 and 1999 to 2004), researchers examined national trends in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption (percentage of drinkers, amount consumed, consumption location and type of beverage) among U.S. adults. Bleich, along with colleagues, identified six mutually exclusive beverage categories: sugar-sweetened beverages (soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks and punches, low-calorie drinks, sweetened tea, and other sweetened beverages), 100 percent juice, diet beverages, milk, coffee or tea, and alcohol.

Earlier studies have linked consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages to the obesity epidemic, which affects two-thirds of adults and increases the risk for adverse health conditions such as type 2 diabetes. Adults are considered to be overweight if their body mass index is 25 or higher, and obese, if 30 or higher.

"Although this analysis does not attempt to estimate the effect of sugar-sweetened beverage intake on obesity incidence, a number of studies have linked sugar-sweetened beverage consumption to obesity and type 2 diabetes," said Youfa Wang, MD, PhD, author and associate professor with the Bloomberg School's Center for Human Nutrition. "Based on these nationally representative surveys, our study found higher sugar-sweetened beverage consumption also happened to be among populations at greater risk for obesity. There are few signs of improvement over the past decade and the situation seems to become worse among young adults aged 20 to 44."

According to Bleich and colleagues, efforts to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption may be an important strategy for reducing empty calorie intake in the adult diet in the United States.

Source: Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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