

Study: Confusion surrounds added vs. natural sugar in drinks

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(Medical Xpress)—Consumers who are more concerned about what types of sugars are in their drinks will likely choose a less-sweetened beverage, although most people don't know the difference between natural and added sugars, a new University of Florida study shows.

Gail Rampersaud, a UF registered dietitian, and Lisa House, a UF food and resource economics professor—both with the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences—teamed with other UF researchers to conduct the 60-question online survey, in which people from across the U.S. answered questions about their perceptions about various drinks.

They surveyed 3,361 adults to gauge how often they consumed non-alcoholic [beverages](#), as well as their knowledge and perceptions about sugars in those drinks.

About half the participants said one of their top three concerns about beverages was sugar, and they drank fewer sugar-sweetened beverages than those who did not list sugar as a top concern, the study showed.

The research found that many consumers do not have a major concern about added sugars in beverages they drink, and continue to consume relatively high amounts. Men drink up to 550 calories a day in beverages, and sugar-sweetened beverages rank as the fourth-highest contributor to mean energy intake in the American diet, the study showed.

The study was published online by the journal Nutrition Research earlier this month.

"The issue is: the Nutrition Facts panel does not make a distinction between [natural sugars](#) and added sugars," said Rampersaud, the study's lead author. "It would help consumers if added sugars were listed separately." The labels list "sugars" but don't define whether they're added or sugars that are natural to the beverage, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Research on the role of sugar-sweetened beverages shows strong evidence that they contribute to weight gain in adults. Thus consumers may not always know how much or what types of sugar they're choosing.

Based on previous studies, researchers hypothesized that survey respondents would have limited knowledge about sugars in their drinks. They also believed consumers would drink whatever tasted good, regardless of sugar concerns. House said researchers were right on their first hypothesis but wrong on their second.

More than half the participants saw sodas, fruit drinks, fruit juice cocktails and sports drinks as sugary while almost half characterized diet sodas as sugary, suggesting many respondents saw the word "sugary" as a sweet-tasting beverage, and not necessarily one with added sweetener, the study said. Some 40 percent said 100 percent fruit juice is sugary, even though it has no added sugar, House said.

According to the 2013 International Food and Information Council's Food & Health Survey, 58 percent of Americans say they are trying to limit or avoid sugars. The UF study nearly mirrored the council's report, with 51 percent saying sugar was one of their top three concerns in a beverage.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend consumers drink water instead of sugary beverages. But UF researchers think many people misunderstand the word "sugary."

"If we're going to be using the term 'sugary' in dietary guidance to refer to beverages with added sugars, we need to make sure people know what that means," House said.

Provided by University of Florida

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