

Bubble, Fizz, Guzzle, Gulp: What's in this Drink Anyway?



Let's face it, we live in a diet-confused, weight-loss-obsessed culture. That's because our processed food supply is a mess, and there seems to be no end to the rising obesity crisis. But with all the focus on food, I notice that many of my patients diminish the impact of their drink choices.

Americans now consume nearly 100 pounds of sugar per person each year; and nearly half of that comes from fruit juice, sodas, sports and energy drinks. These are classified as Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (or SSBs). Together these comprise the top source of calories in the American diet (averaging 45 gallons per person per year). The excessive sugar leads right to obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, depression, tooth decay and more.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization advised us to cut our sugar consumption by 75%—down to 5% of our daily caloric intake. That's only about 26 grams (6.5 teaspoons) per day ... TOTAL. Believe it or not, we could get halfway there if we could ALL simply eliminate SSBs, including 100% juice and every single sports drink.

Next, the question I frequently get is "What about *sugar-free*?"—an umbrella term used for all nonnutritive sweeteners (NNSs). Are any of these drinks better for us? The answer is a flat-out "No!" We need to recognize a "diet" drink as a chemical sh!t-storm; and even though we don't tend to associate NNSs as the cancer source they once were, we know they stimulate metabolic disfunction such as insulin resistance and diabetes in a similar progression to real sugar.

Now let's look at milk choices. Cow's milk has garnered a tough rap sheet during the last decade. Dairy, in general, has been somewhat demonized as a trigger for systemic inflammation and mucous production. That's especially true for lactose-sensitive or casein-allergic people. The consensus is that around 80% of children with a cow milk allergy will outgrow it by the time they're 3 to 5 years old. There doesn't seem to be conclusive evidence supporting increased mucous production in people without dairy sensitivity, but ... be quick to initiate a dairy-free "holiday" if you suspect this might be helpful. You'll know if milk was a contributing factor within a couple weeks.

As an alternative, there are somewhat healthful milks on the market today. Though none of them offer the protein content of traditional dairy, they bring plenty of nutrition of their own. Ounce for ounce, nut milks are less caloric than cow's milk, and many of them have as much (or more) calcium and vitamin D. Almond milk is the lowest in calories—as long as you don't

buy an added sugar variety. Beware of the vanilla or other flavored milks or creamers. If it sounds at all un-plain, check the label for added sugar just to be sure. While you're at it, notice the other chemical additives: salt, flavors, gums, emulsifiers and binding agents.

If you want to avoid all that, you should know that grain and nut milks (from oats, almonds, macadamia, hazelnuts and cashews) are easy to make at home. All you need is a good blender (or grinder) and a strainer bag. Buy the nut milk bags online, then search that process on Google or YouTube.

I will save alcohol for another article, but let's address another sensitive subject: *caffeine*. Sensitive because it treads on your own (probable) drug addiction. Let's face it, we are a caffeine-addicted culture, and our children are little addicts-in-training. In fact, we're so good at training our kids to be addicted that by the time they advance to college age, 93% of them drink this drug *daily*. That's because 73% of us buy and serve caffeine to our 5- to 12-year-olds. Why? That's a question I cannot answer, considering that the American Academy of Pediatrics (and other child experts) say *kids under the age of 12 should avoid caffeine* altogether. We will all do well to quell our addiction by getting more (and better) sleep.

Finally ... there's water. About 60% of our body is made up of it, and half of us don't get enough. It sure seems boring against the backdrop of exciting beverage choices on the shelf, but hydration is critically important to your health.

Now we wonder ... is bottled water better than tap? If so, *which* bottled water? And is there any harm in drinking from single-use plastic containers—aside from the devastating impact it's having on the environment? Should we filter our tap water? Is fluoride necessary? What about fizzy water? Is it safe to add flavorings to it? And what harm is caused by the *acidity* of most commercial waters? All of this and more is detailed in the "*Brave Parent*" book section on Drink.

Keep learning—your health and happiness depend on it. And as you clean up your personal drinking habits, you'll feel healthier—I promise!



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