



1 soda a day BOOSTS HEART DISEASE?

NEW STUDY POINTS A STEADY FINGER AT THE SOFT DRINK INDUSTRY – BOTH DIET AND REGULAR SODAS; OF COURSE, THE SODA INDUSTRY ARGUES OTHERWISE

SIPPING EVEN ONE SODA A day just may up your risk of getting heart disease, so says a new study. And no, drinking a diet soda doesn't exempt you from the risk. Bottom line is that a soda habit elevates the risk of developing 'metabolic syndrome,' a condition that in turn boosts the chance of getting both heart disease and diabetes.

"Even one soda per day increases your risk of developing metabolic syndrome by about 50%," says Ramachandran Vasani, MD, professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine and the senior author of the study, published in the July 31 issue of the *American Heart Association's* journal *Circulation*.

A *Metabolic Syndrome* diagnosis requires that three of five criteria must be met: a large waistline, elevated blood pressure, elevated fasting blood sugar, elevated fasting triglycerides, or reduced HDL or "good" cholesterol.

"This study adds to the wealth of scientific evidence that sugar-sweetened beverages increase the risk of metabolic syndrome," says Vasani. Already, he says, the rise in sugary drink consumption has been linked to the epidemic of obesity and diabetes among children and teens and to the development of high blood pressure in adults.

NOT SO FAST, RETORTS THE DRINK INDUSTRY

Not surprisingly, the food and beverage industry takes issue with the finding. "Oversimplified" is the response from Roger Clemens, DrPH, a spokesperson for the *Institute of Food Technologists*.

"There are many attributes associated with the development of metabolic syndrome," says Clemens. "Some of which are part of lifestyle choices, such as eating too many calories." Diet soda is a more appropriate choice

than regular soda, he says. "It's way too soon to say stop drinking diet soda," says Clemens, a professor of molecular toxicology at the University of Southern California School of Pharmacy, Los Angeles, who is familiar with the new research. "Diet soda, in moderation, can be part of a healthy lifestyle."

Of course, there's the problematic jury's-still-out controversy surrounding the artificial sweeteners in the diet sodas, but we digress.

STUDY STATS

The *Framingham Offspring Study*, conducted by Vasani and his colleagues, evaluated about 3,500 men and women. The offspring study began in 1971, following the original *Framingham Heart Study* launched in 1948. The offspring study included 5,124 people in all. The questions about soda and other dietary habits were asked at three different exam periods, from 1987 to 1991, 1991 to 1995, and 1995 to 1998. The average age of those who answered questions about their soft drink intake and other health habits was 53 during the three exam periods.

At the first exam period, those who drank one or more soft drinks daily had a 48% increased prevalence of having metabolic syndrome compared with those who drank less than one a day, the researchers found. As the study progressed, drinking one or more sodas a day was linked with a 44% higher risk of participants developing metabolic syndrome, Vasani's team found, compared with drinking less than a soda a day.

The researchers looked at soda consumption and the person's risk of developing each of the five criteria of metabolic syndrome. "Other than elevated blood pressure, the risk of developing the other four increased from about 20% to 30% with one soda a day," Vasani reports. They also found a trend toward an increased risk of developing high blood pressure with soda consumption, but it wasn't enough to be considered significant. ■

THE SODA OBESITY CONNECTION

Because they don't eat less, people who get extra "liquid calories" from soft drinks gain extra weight, an analysis of 88 soda studies suggests. The finding comes from researchers at the *Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity* at *Yale University*. Researchers found quite a clear association between soft-drink intake and taking in more calories. The most compelling studies showed that, on days when people drink soft drinks, they consumed more calories than on the days when they did not have soft drinks.

WHY? The simplest explanation is that people don't compensate for the extra calories in sodas. A person who has a hamburger and a soda, for example, doesn't eat less of his or her hamburger -- or fewer fries -- than a person who washes the burger down with water. Sometimes, in fact, people who regularly drank soft drinks ate even more. The number of additional calories they took in was more than the calories in their soft drinks. It is almost as if sodas led to greater calorie intake because people get calibrated to a certain level of sweetness.

BOTTOM LINE - If you are going to pick one change to make in your diet, and you drink sugared soft drinks, that would be a great place start.

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