

Sugary Drink Swaps

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Women who regularly drink sugary beverages are at a significantly higher risk for heart disease, according to a [study](#) published in the *Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

The study examined more than 88,000 women whose health was tracked from 1980 through 2004. When the study began in 1980, none of the women had been previously diagnosed with heart disease, diabetes or stroke.

Link to Heart Disease

The study found that women who drank the most sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) were more likely to smoke, get less exercise and have a higher body mass index (BMI). Women who drank more SSBs were also more likely to consume more sugar and total fat but less alcohol, fruit and vegetables. But even after accounting for other unhealthy lifestyle habits, the researchers found that drinking SSBs was still associated with a higher risk of heart disease. The study did not find a significant association between drinking artificially sweetened beverages and an increased risk of heart disease.



Sugar Alternatives

"I tell my patients with diabetes the same thing about beverages that I advise most of my patients in general, which is to avoid SSBs," says UVA clinical dietitian Katherine Basbaum, MS, RD. "SSBs include regular soda, juices (except for the *occasional* 4–6 oz. glass of 100 percent juice), sports drinks, energy drinks and sweet tea. The reason these drinks should be avoided is because the body doesn't have much work to do breaking down these liquid sugars, so they absorb into the bloodstream much too quickly and cause a spike in blood glucose levels."

So what does that leave to stay hydrated? Basbaum suggests water (sparkling or flat), iced teas and coffees either unsweetened or prepared with a sugar substitute like Splenda or stevia, sugar-free and calorie-free drink mixes or drops like Crystal Light or Mio, and diet sodas. Skim or low-fat milk is also a good beverage option, but it must be counted toward your max carbohydrates for a particular meal or snack.

Are They Safe?

"Though I often get patients expressing concern over the safety of artificial sweeteners, I explain that they are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as food additives or general recognized as safe (GRAS)," says Basbaum. "The FDA approval process includes determination of probable intake, cumulative effect from all uses and toxicology studies in animals. Though I do endorse artificially sweetened beverages for the purpose of controlling blood sugar and weight, I always give a strong recommendation to drink one 8-oz. glass of water for every beverage consumed that contains sugar substitutes and/or caffeine."