University of California Research Consortium on Beverages and Health

The Health Harms of Sugary Drinks

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American Heart Association.

Extensive evidence links sugary drink consumption to increased risk of many negative health outcomes including:

Type 2 Diabetes

Sugary drinks are the #1 source of added sugars in the American diet[1] and have repeatedly been linked to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes.[2]

For adults, consuming one to two sugary drinks a day increases the risk of diabetes by 26%.[3]

The risk of dying from COVID-19 is almost twice as high in people with type 2 diabetes than in those without it.[4]

The prevalence of diabetes in the U.S. has increased eight-fold over the last 60 years.[5]

Black adults (14.3%) and Latino adults (14.6%) suffer disproportionately from diabetes in California, with more than twice the prevalence than among non-Hispanic white adults (6.1%).[6]

California spends over $27 billion annually on direct medical costs of diabetes.[7]

People with diabetes have more than double the medical expenses of those who do not have diabetes.[8]

Heart Disease

Consuming sugary drinks significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and CVD mortality, and each additional daily serving adds to the risk.[9]

Those with the highest levels of added sugars in their diet are twice as likely to die from heart disease as those with low sugar intake.[10]

Children who consume excessive added sugars have a higher risk of heart disease in adulthood.[11]

Heart disease is the number one killer in California.[12] Over 60,000 people in California died of heart disease in 2017.[13]

Heart disease mortality rates are significantly higher for Black adults than for white adults in California.[14]

Annual health care costs for heart disease in California have been estimated at $37 billion, greater than for any other chronic condition.[15]

Unhealthy Weight

Consuming sugary drinks increases the risk of gaining excess weight.[16]

Excess weight is a significant risk factor for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers.[17]

Having excess weight may triple the risk of hospitalization due to a COVID-19 infection.[18]

In 2020, 30.3% of California adults reported they had obesity (a body mass index (BMI) of 30.0 or higher).[19] If current trends continue, adult obesity in California is projected to rise to 41.5% by 2030.[20]

California's 2020 prevalence of self-reported obesity for Hispanic adults (36.2%) and Black adults (41.7%) is significantly higher than for white adults (24.4%).[21]

California has the highest obesity-related costs in the United States, estimated at $15.2 billion annually.[22]

A 2¢/oz state excise tax on sugary drinks is projected to prevent nearly 200,000 cases of obesity and save more than $1.8 billion in health care costs.[23]

Dental Caries

There is strong and consistent evidence that consumption of sugary drinks is associated with dental caries among children and adolescents.[24]

Dental caries are largely preventable yet remain the most common chronic health condition among California's children.[25]

More than half of California's kindergartners, and more than 70% of third graders, have had tooth decay.[26]

Tooth decay leads to 874,000 missed days of school each year in California, which interferes with academic success and costs schools $29 to $32 million annually in average daily attendance funding.[27]

Tooth decay also negatively affects children's academic performance, social-emotional development, sleep, and nutrition.[28]

Children from low-income families and children of color are much more likely to have tooth decay and suffer the consequences of untreated disease.[29]

The University of California Research Consortium on Beverages and Health includes faculty from every UC campus working to provide California legislators and communities with the science base for policy to decrease consumption of sugary drinks and increase consumption of water and other healthy beverages.

University of California Research Consortium on Beverages and Health • Bringing Science to Policy

• Find our entire factsheet series at https://npi.ucanr.edu/Resources/UCRCBH/ • For more information contact: ceahecht@ucanr.edu •

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