



Sugary drinks

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How many times have we looked at someone walking out of a convenience store carrying a giant pail of pop or slushie? “Imagine how much sugar they’re getting,” we think, as we head to our local café to order up a delicious specialty coffee with a bit of syrup and of course, some whip to round out the flavour experience. Makes you think, doesn’t it?

The excessive consumption of sugary drinks by children often replaces their intake of healthier drinks. In turn, this contributes to caloric intake which may itself contribute to obesity. While many factors combine to increase obesity, reducing the consumption of sugary drinks among children will help address the trend. In addition to weight gains, sipping on sugary drinks can also damage teeth leading to cavities and dental erosion.

In an effort to better understand the problem, and to come up with a way of countering increasing consumption of sugary drinks, the BC Ministry of Health contracted Dieticians of Canada. Their research discovered some interesting, and surprising, opinions and gaps in knowledge among consumers.

For example, people were surprised by many of the facts presented, particularly on the amount of sugar included in sugary drinks and the impact these beverages can have on their health. Adult focus groups generally perceived beverages with artificial sweeteners as an unhealthy alternative to sugar, taking the view that natural ingredients (including sugar) should always be

chosen over “chemical” ingredients. Researchers also found more generally that parents adopted a rule of thumb that sugars that are less refined and more “natural-sounding” were inherently healthier; there is little nutritional difference between types of sugars (honey, sucrose, fructose...).

It might surprise you how much sugar they are actually drinking. An iced tea (355 ml) typically contains about eight teaspoons (or cubes) of sugar. Not enough? A 500 ml energy drink will almost double that to 14 cubes! And that specialty coffee we mentioned? Try 17 cubes of sugar. A large slushie (1 litre) tops out at around 24 teaspoons of sugar. If faced with a sugar bowl and teaspoon, would we ever consume those quantities? Doubtful.

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To calculate your own figure, take the amount of sugar listed on the ingredients panel in grams (e.g. 60 g) and divide it by four to get how many cubes or teaspoons of sugar are in the serving (in this case 15 cubes or teaspoons!)

Sugary drinks do little for our health—they just add calories we do not need. Nor do most provide more than tiny bits of nutrition as they replace healthier options like water and milk. And when considering how to make the right choice, consider that it is better to eat calories (such as a fruit) than to drink them (fruit juice).

The best choice to satisfy thirst is water. Drink water with meals and regularly throughout the day. It provides a calorie and sugar-free way to keep hydrated. Water is essential to good health.