

Beverage Breakdown

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Water, 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices, and unsweetened beverages like coffee, tea, and sparkling water provide proper hydration. However, we often see sweetened coffee drinks, soda, lemonade, energy drinks, sweet tea, sports drinks, and more sugar-sweetened beverages on the menu or shelves at the grocery store. Often, these drinks contain high amounts of added sugar and little amounts of valuable nutrients that support our health.

Sugary Drinks

A sugar-sweetened beverage is sweetened with sugar of any form. The sweetener in these drinks is added in the processing or preparation of the beverage. These are the leading sources of added sugars in the American diet.

Some examples are:

- Sodas
- Lemonade and fruit drinks
- Sports rehydration drinks
- Sweetened iced tea
- Sweetened coffee drinks
- Energy drinks
- Sweetened bottled water

Milk provides vitamins, minerals, and protein in addition to sugar that can naturally be found in the beverage. Flavored milks, like chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla milk, contain added sugar in addition to those natural sugars. One hundred percent fruit and vegetable juices contain the natural sugars you would find in the whole fruit or vegetable in addition to some vitamins and minerals found in the whole food. However, when you eat the whole fruit or vegetable, you are hydrated and get beneficial fiber. Some juices or juice-like beverages that are not 100 percent juice may have sugar added. When possible, reach for the unsweetened varieties of milk and 100 percent juices, or reach for the whole fruit or vegetable if given the chance.

How much is too much?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends added sugar amounts stay at or below 10 percent of daily calories. This means for someone consuming 2,000 calories per day, added sugar would contribute 200 calories or less. The American Heart Association recommends that men consume 36 grams (9 teaspoons) of added sugar or less each day from all food and drinks. For women, they recommend 25 grams (6 teaspoons) or less each day.

Consider how much added sugar is in some common drinks listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Sugar content of common drinks

Drink (12-ounce serving)	Grams of sugar	Teaspoons of sugar
Tap or unsweetened bottled water	0	0
Unsweetened tea or black coffee	0	0
Lemonade	12	3
Sports drinks	20	5
Brewed sweet tea	28	7
Energy drink	36	9
Regular soda	40	10
Fruit juice drink	40	10
Orange soda	52	13

Consuming high amounts of added sugar in food and drinks increases the risk of chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease and contributes to oral cavities. Some research suggests that the body does not respond to the calories in beverages the same way it responds to calories in food. When we take in energy, like large amounts of sugar, in a drink, it doesn't give us the satisfaction we get from eating a meal or tell our bodies that

we are full. This can lead to people taking in more energy than their bodies need.

Added sugar from sugar-sweetened beverages increases the risk of heart disease. The added sugar in these drinks raises LDL (the cholesterol that clogs the arteries) and lowers HDL (the cholesterol that removes cholesterol from the arteries). A high level of LDL in the blood increases the risk for heart disease, and a high level of HDL can reduce the risk. Research has linked soft-drink consumption with risk for high blood pressure. Strong evidence also shows frequent soft-drink intake is linked to lower intake of other important nutrients the body needs.

It is important to be mindful of your consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, as it may affect your health. When consuming sugar-sweetened drinks, it is possible that these options are replacing nutrients that our bodies need, like water for hydration.

Finding Sugar on a Label

Added sugar amounts can be identified using the Nutrition Facts label of packaged products. On a Nutrition Facts label, added sugar will be listed in grams. It may be easier to visualize amounts of sugar in teaspoons rather than grams. To get the number of teaspoons of sugar in a beverage, divide the grams of sugar by 4 (Figure 1).

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	230
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 240mg	6%

12 grams of sugar / 4 =
3 teaspoons of sugar



Figure 1. Nutrition label, with total and added sugar highlighted. Dividing the grams of sugar by four converts the measurement to teaspoons.

Looking at the ingredients list on a drink label may also provide clues. It may be easy to identify a drink that contains brown or granulated sugar, honey, or corn syrup as an added sweetener. Some other forms of sugar, such as liquid fructose, fruit juice concentrates, dextrose, and maltose, may not be as easy to find. When looking at the ingredients to check for added sugars, look for the word “syrup” and words ending in “-ose.” These are most likely added sugars.

Minimizing Sugar with Drink Decisions

Choosing water and unsweetened beverages such as coffee and tea can provide hydration to the body without added sugar. Many sparkling water drinks do not contain added sugar and may be a refreshing substitute for a soda because of the fruit flavor and carbonation. Some methods for reducing the added sugar in your favorite beverage are included in this publication.



Coffee Drinks and Sweet Tea

Sweetened coffee and tea drinks contribute 11 percent of the added sugar consumed by the U.S. population. Store-bought gourmet coffee drinks and those ordered at a coffee shop, especially those marketed on the menu, often contain high amounts of added sugar, whether added with flavored syrups, honey, sweetened/flavored cream, or table sugar. A 16-ounce glass of sweet tea, often thought of as a staple in the South, contains roughly 25 grams (about 6 teaspoons) of added sugar. Next time you order or buy one of these options, consider these ideas to reduce added sugar:

- Order hot or iced coffee and ask for specific amounts of your favorite flavor, milk, and/or cream.
- Ask for coffee beverages prepared with half the amount of sweetener.
- Ask for half-sweet/half-unsweet tea when dining out.
- Order a smaller size.
- Leave out the whipped topping.
- Use sugar-free sweeteners like sugar alternatives or ask for sugar-free syrup.

Energy Drinks

Some energy drinks contain as much as 60 grams (15 teaspoons) of sugar per container. In addition, these drinks are high in caffeine and other legal stimulants. Some may contain as much as 300 milligrams of caffeine. In comparison, a can of soda contains about 35 milligrams of caffeine, and an eight-ounce cup of coffee contains about 100 milligrams. Some research shows that caffeine intake up to 400 milligrams in healthy adults is not associated with harmful effects. However, if a person drinks a coffee in the morning and an energy drink in the afternoon, this limit can be exceeded. These drinks are regulated like dietary supplements, and there is no requirement to declare the amount of caffeine on the label of these products, further putting consumers at risk. Energy drinks may have serious life-threatening effects in individuals who are sensitive to caffeine, youth and adolescents, and people who have pre-existing health conditions.

- Avoid energy drinks.
- Choose balanced meals and snacks throughout the day to boost energy.
- Make water your drink of choice.
- Consider unsweetened hot or iced tea for a gentle boost of caffeine.

Sports Drinks

Sports drinks may contain up to 20 grams of sugar in 12 ounces, and they are often sold in 20-ounce bottles. Be aware that some sports drinks that have “water” in the name can still have added sugar. Powdered drink mixes that are added to water include added sugar, too. Often these are packaged as electrolyte drinks or rehydration powders. Generally, water provides adequate hydration for those involved in daily physical activity. Sports drinks and oral rehydration solutions, including these powders, may be useful for athletes, those involved in periods of physical activity for longer than 60 to 90 minutes, and those engaging in physical activity in high-heat conditions. Overall, water provides proper hydration for our bodies when consumed in adequate amounts and paired with a balanced eating pattern.

- Use water to quench your thirst.
- Choose a sugar-free sports drink or powder.

Alcohol

If choosing to drink alcohol, consume in moderation. Cocktails with mixers, cream liqueur, and coconut mix quickly add grams of sugar.

- Choose lighter mixers like club soda and flavor them with fruit, like a lemon or lime, or opt for the sugar-free version.
- Drink water alongside your alcoholic beverage. Consider drinking an eight-ounce glass of water after each alcoholic beverage to support hydration.

Regular Soda

Cut back on soda intake and consume in moderation.

- Choose diet instead of regular soda to slowly cut back on added sugar each day.
- Order a smaller size.
- Share your drink with someone.
- Choose sparkling water for a burst of carbonation.

Water

Let water be your drink of choice. Ways to get more water in your diet include:

- Drink water with your meals.
- If ordering a sweet drink, also order water for hydration, and drink the sweetened beverage for enjoyment.
- Carry a bottle of water with you.
- Add slices of fresh fruit or a splash of fruit juice to your water for flavor.
- Consider sugar-free flavor packets that can be added to water.

Summary

Sugar-sweetened beverages contain added sugar and provide few essential nutrients to the diet. To provide proper hydration for our bodies, choose water and other beverages with little or no added sugar. Consuming too much added sugar can put us at risk of facing health problems like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cavities, and more. All foods and beverages can fit into a healthy eating pattern with some extra consideration. Reach for water, unsweetened or less-sweet tea and coffee, milk, and 100 percent fruit and vegetable juice most of the time. Choose a balanced snack as a pick-me-up instead of caffeine. Consider other ways to lower the amount of added sugar consumed with beverages when ordering or purchasing at the store.

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