

Studies Reveal Dangers of Soft Drinks, Even Diet Drinks

Lyle Loughry, January 2008

Drinking Colas increases risk of hypertension

A new study from Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Mass., concludes there is a significant link between high blood pressure in women and the consumption of sugared or diet cola drinks. This was a surprising discovery even to the researchers since colas do not contain any ingredients known to cause hypertension.

The study: Led by Wolfgang C. Winkelmayr, M.D., the team followed 155,594 women for 12 years, all of whom participated in the Nurses' Health Studies I and II. While all the women had normal blood pressure when the studies began in the early 1990s, 33,000 developed hypertension during the follow-up years.

The results: When the team analyzed the beverages the women consumed, they concluded habitual coffee drinking was not linked to an increased risk of high blood pressure, but sugared and diet colas had a significant link. Is it the caffeine in the colas that causes the high blood pressure? The researchers speculate that it is not caffeine but perhaps some other compound contained in soda-type soft drinks that may be responsible for the increased risk in hypertension.

They wrote in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), "Even If these associations are causal, they may have considerable impact on public health." Approximately 50 million people in the United States have hypertension, and the prevalence is increasing. Hypertension is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, stroke and congestive heart failure.

Drinking Colas increase risk of Kidney Damage:

A new study from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park, N.C. reports that drinking more than two servings of cola a day could be putting your kidneys at great risk.

"Our study suggests that there's something about drinking cola beverages that is associated with increased risk for chronic kidney disease," lead study author Dr. Dale P. Sandler told Reuters Health. "We don't believe that it's caffeine, and we don't believe it's the sugar." Sandler thinks it's the phosphoric acid in colas--the ingredient that not only serves as a preservative, but also gives cola that characteristic tangy taste.

Exposure to high levels of phosphates has previously been linked to acute and long-term kidney damage. For this study, 465 people who were recently diagnosed with kidney disease and 467 healthy people who were matched by age, gender and race were asked to list the types of beverages they drink and how frequently they drink them. Sandler found that consuming just three cans of sweetened or diet cola daily more than doubles your chances of developing chronic kidney disease. The same effect was seen with both sweetened or diet colas. No increased risk was found with other types of carbonated beverages.

Drinking Soft Drinks can damage DNA:

You may want to think twice before you sip another soft drink: research reported in the UK's Independent newspaper says a common preservative used in fizzy drinks can switch off essential parts of DNA. The preservative may bring on premature aging and trigger diseases associated with old age. The problem preservative is sodium benzoate, commonly used for many years by the \$160 billion worldwide soft drink industry. Sodium benzoate, derived from benzoic acid, prevents mold in drinks like Coca-Cola, Oasis, Dr. Pepper, etc., and is also used in pickles and sauces.

Alarm bells have already been ringing about it, because it's been discovered that when it's mixed with vitamin C in soft drinks, it creates the carcinogenic substance benzene. Now UK Professor Peter Piper of Sheffield University has sounded an even louder alarm – his experiments show that benzoate damages DNA in the energy-producing mitochondria of cells.

"These chemicals have the ability to cause severe damage to DNA in the mitochondria to the point that they totally inactivate it: they knock it out altogether," Piper said. "The mitochondria consumes the oxygen to give you energy and if you damage it – as happens in a number of diseased states – then the cell starts to malfunction very seriously. And there is a whole array of diseases that are now being tied to damage to this DNA—Parkinson's and quite a lot of neuro-degenerative diseases, but above all the whole process of ageing."

The World Health Organization, the Food Standards Agency in the UK, and the US Food and Drug Administration all say that sodium benzoate is safe. Professor Piper, however, says that FDA tests are out of date. "The food industry will say these compounds have been tested and they are completely safe," Piper said. "By the criteria of modern safety testing, the safety tests were inadequate. Like all things, safety testing moves forward and you can conduct a much more rigorous safety test than you could 50 years ago, and we have done that."

Drinking Diet Sodas can increase risk of Type 2 Diabetes:

If you drink diet sodas, beware. While you're ingesting minimal calories, you could be raising your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes--a finding that has stunned the researchers conducting this study that has been published in the journal Circulation.

The study:

Epidemiologists from the University of Minnesota wanted to determine which foods and drinks contribute to heart disease risk. The diets of 9,514 people, most of whom were 45 to 64 years old, were examined in this study that was funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, reports Reuters. Unlike previous research, the team conducted a detailed examination at precisely what foods and drinks people were consuming. Based on the results, the study participants were grouped into one of two dietary patterns:

--Western: lots of processed meat, fried foods and red meat.

--Prudent: fruits and vegetables with small amounts of fish and poultry.

The results:

Two foods in particular upped the risk of heart disease--red meat and diet soft drinks. Perhaps not surprisingly, people who eat two or more servings of red meat daily are far more likely to develop a cluster of risk factors--known as metabolic syndrome--that can lead to heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Specifically, the risk is increased by 25 percent, compared with people who eat only two servings of meat a week. Metabolic syndrome symptoms include excessive fat around the waist, high cholesterol, high blood sugar and high blood pressure.

But no one expected diet soft drinks to be linked to these elevated risk factors for heart disease and type 2 diabetes, although a different study published last July had similar results. "When we found that diet soda promoted risk we were surprised," lead study author Dr. Lyn Steffen told Reuters. "But then we thought about other behavior patterns. It may be associated with compensating for eating higher calorie food. People may say, 'I can eat this cookie because I am drinking this diet soda.'" This has led the Minnesota team to conclude that eating lots of meat, fried foods and diet soda significantly increase the risk of heart disease.

Drinking Diet Sodas increase risk of Heart Disease:

You drink diet sodas so you won't get fat. It's the healthy thing to do, right? Uh oh. Now comes word from the Boston University School of Medicine that

diet drinks can boost your risk for heart disease just like full-calorie, sugary sodas. The Associated Press and Reuters report that people who drink more than one diet soda daily have the same risk for heart disease as those who consume sugary sodas, according to a large study led by Dr. Vasan Ramachandran.

Rather than actually causing heart disease, diet drinks provide a surprising link to the condition. Using data from a subgroup of the massive, multi-generational heart study that followed residents of Framingham, Mass., the researchers found that people who drank more than one diet or regular soda a day had a 44 percent higher risk of developing metabolic syndrome four years later than those who consumed less than one soda a day. Metabolic syndrome, which increases the risk for heart disease, has several symptoms: excessively large waistlines, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, low levels of "good" cholesterol, and high levels of triglycerides.

"When you have metabolic syndrome, your risk of developing heart disease or stroke doubles. You also have a risk of developing diabetes," Ramachandran told Reuters. Researchers, who expected those who drank regular soda to have a greater risk of developing metabolic syndrome than those who stuck with the diet drinks, were quite surprised by the study results. Ramachandran surmises that while drinking no-calorie diet sodas won't make you fat, it could increase your craving for more sweets.

Those who drank one or more soft drinks, daily, regular or diet, had a:

31 percent greater risk of becoming obese.

30 percent increased risk of developing a larger waist circumference.

25 percent higher risk of developing high blood triglycerides.

25 percent greater risk of developing high blood sugar.

32 percent increased risk of having low high-density lipoprotein or "good" cholesterol levels.

And all of this adds up to a 44 percent higher risk of developing metabolic syndrome. The study findings appeared in the journal, *Circulation*, published by the American Heart Association. Any suggestion that sodas, even the ones with artificial sweeteners, are healthy or good for you, totally lacks credibility.

For more information on the dangers of artificial sweeteners, themselves, read

the article, [The Truth About Artificial Sweeteners](#) on the Featured Health Articles section of this same website. Your best and safest bet? Drink purified water, and lots of it. You'll have fewer health problems, and live longer.