Sugar-Sweetened Beverages and the Link between Obesity and Cancer

Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is linked to weight gain, overweight and obesity.

- A 2007 report by the World Cancer Research Fund and American Institute for Cancer Research concluded that "the "epidemiological and mechanistic evidence that drinks containing added sugars, including sucrose and high-fructose corn syrup, are a cause of weight gain, overweight, and obesity. Like energy-dense foods and drinks, they have this effect by promoting excess energy intake[1]."
- A 2007 meta-analysis on the effects of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption concluded that[2]:
  - Individuals do not reduce their calorie intake from other foods for the extra calories in these beverages and therefore are consuming more calories overall.
  - Individuals who consume these beverages drink less milk and have less overall calcium consumption.
  - Consumption of these beverages is related to higher intake of carbohydrates, lower intakes of fruit and dietary fiber and lower intakes of a variety of macronutrients.
- One study concluded that women who consumed one or more servings of a soft drink per day were twice as likely to develop diabetes as women who consumed less than one serving a month[3].

Sugar-sweetened beverages accounted for 13 percent of total daily caloric intake in adolescents in 2004[4].

Overweight and obesity contribute to 14 to 20 percent of all cancer-related deaths in the U.S.[5]

- Overweight and obesity are associated with increased risk for several common cancers, including colon, esophagus, kidney, endometrial and breast cancer in postmenopausal women[6].
  - Obese men and women have a two times greater risk of esophageal cancer than healthy weight individuals[7].
  - Obese, postmenopausal women have a 1.5 times great risk of breast cancer and greater risk of actually dying from their cancer than healthy weight women[8].
  - Obese women have a 2 to 4 times greater risk of endometrial cancer than health weight women[9].
- There is also suggestive evidence that overweight and obesity are associated with increased risk for other cancers, including the pancreas, aggressive prostate, gall bladder, thyroid, ovary, cervix, and for multiple myeloma and Hodgkin's disease[10].
- The biological link between overweight and obesity to cancer is believed to be related to multiple effects on fat and sugar metabolism, immune function, hormone levels and proteins that affect hormone levels, and other factors related to cell proliferation and growth[11].

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Surgeon General, the Institute of Medicine, the World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research all recommend reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks, as a critical strategy to reverse the epidemic of overweight and obesity in our nation, especially among our children[14].

Obesity is a major public health crisis in the U.S. with nearly two-thirds of adults and 18 percent of teens overweight or obese[12]. The health care costs associated with obesity are approximately $147 billion each year[13].

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) supports a broad range of evidence-based strategies to prevent and reduce obesity, foster healthy behaviors and remove barriers to healthy living in all populations in order to reduce cancer incidence and death in this country.

ACS CAN supports evidenced-based efforts that reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and improves the overall nutritional quality of the foods and beverages Americans consume. In particular, ACS CAN supports the removal of sugar-sweetened beverages and other low-nutrient foods out of schools.

ACS CAN supports efforts that improve a community's ability to promote good nutrition and physical activity by providing adequate resources, building a public health infrastructure, providing easy to understand, culturally competent information about healthy living, and increasing access to and availability of healthy foods and safe and convenient places to be physically active. Behavioral research is critical, as is coverage for prevention services for all.

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