

Beyond the Fizz

By Dr. Robert Mirandola

It is estimated that in 2000, 15 billion gallons of soda was sold in the United States alone and an average American is estimated to consume about 53 to 57 gallons of soda per year! Most everyone has a co-worker, friend, or family member who does not consume just one can per day, but several. Coincidentally, most people recognize that drinking soda is not exactly "good", however, they do not really understand the serious health risks involved either. Therefore, this month we review the major ingredients in this popular beverage as well as the health risks that accompany it.

Major Ingredients

Phosphoric Acid: This ingredient is known to pull calcium from your skeletal structure, increase phosphate in your blood, and directly leads to **osteoporosis and bone / teeth softening**. It is also noted that drinking at least three cans of soda per week increases risk of **kidney stones** by 15 percent.

Sugar: One can of soda includes approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar (over 100 percent of your RDA). What does this mean to your health? Experts agree that drinking one can of soda per day translates to more than 1 pound of weight gain per month as this sugar easily and quickly gets turned into fat. When you consume sugar, your pancreas releases the appropriate amount of insulin to store this sugar away in various tissues of the body. Large doses of sugar leads to a prolonged insulin spike which in time has been proven to be the predecessor of all major chronic diseases including cancer and diabetes. Many experts suspect that this may be the reason why incidence of type 2 diabetes has increased from 6.6 million in 1980 to 20.8 million today. Along with these, excessive sugar can cause high blood pressure (hypertension) and heart disease.

High Fructose Corn Syrup: Even more dangerous than sugar (and coincidentally the sweetener found in nearly all soft drinks on the market today) HFCS converts to fat easier and faster than any other sugar. HFCS also takes a hard toll on your liver as high consumption can have an effect similar to that of chronic alcoholics leading to cirrhosis.

Aspartame: This is a common chemical used as a sugar substitute in diet sodas and has been linked to 92 different health side effects. These include brain tumors, birth defects, emotional disorders, seizures, and again, diabetes.

Caffeine: Aside from the mental boost that caffeine is known for, this ingredient can cause insomnia, high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, and vitamin or mineral depletion as well as other conditions.

Tap Water: Many sodas are made with nothing more than pure tap water. So what is the problem? Depending on where the tap water is sourced, it may commonly include chlorine, traces of lead, various organic pollutants, and traces of pharmaceuticals.

Artificial Coloring: Some common artificial food colors have been linked to cancer, digestive problems, neurological conditions, ADHD, heart disease or obesity. Additionally, in 2007, a British study published in *The Lancet* determined the consumption of artificial coloring and preservatives in food and beverages has been shown to increase hyperactivity in kids.

Please note that while certain diet or caffeine free sodas offer sugar substitutes or no caffeine respectively, they usually still do contain many, if not all, of the other ingredients described above. Simply put, there is NOTHING healthy or beneficial from drinking soda. So, what are some alternatives?

Alternatives

Sparkling Water: If it is carbonation you crave, buy sparkling spring water and spike it with fresh lemon, lime, or a splash of your favorite fruit juice.

Vegetable Juice: This is a low-calorie way to benefit from all of the veggies you know you should be eating. It also contains much less natural sugar than fruit juices.

Iced or Hot Tea: Many iced or hot teas (especially green tea) contain antioxidants, vitamins C and E, help prevent certain types of cancers, and promote immune health.

Coffee: Although this option is not the best alternative, coffee is still is a better choice than the excessive health risks associated with soda.

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