

Have a Heart: Say No to Soda

STUDY SUGGESTS HIGH INTAKE INCREASES RISK OF HEART DISEASE.

Editorial Staff

It's not enough that [soft drinks](#) and other sugar-sweetened beverages have been linked to cavities and weight gain, among other negative health consequences. Now comes a study that suggests high daily intake of soft drinks can elevate your risk of developing heart disease. According to the study,¹ published in *Circulation*, a publication of the American Heart Association, study participants who drank the most sugar-sweetened beverages daily had a 20 percent higher risk of coronary heart disease compared to those who drank the least.

Coronary heart disease, also called coronary artery disease, is characterized by a narrowing of the small blood vessels that lead to the heart. The result: diminished blood and oxygen supply to the heart, which can cause chest pain, shortness of breath and even a heart attack.

By the way, if you think drinking diet soft drinks will get you out of the woods when it comes to health risks, think again: A recent study² in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* suggests that consuming diet soft drinks daily (versus none) increases your risk of suffering a vascular event, such as a [heart attack](#), stroke or even vascular-related death, by a whopping 43 percent. So, tell your patients to ditch the sodas and other sugary drinks, and think natural and sugar-free when it comes to hydration: tea or the age-old standby, water. Here are some other tips to pass on to patients as part of your heart-healthy wellness care:

- *Maintain healthy blood pressure.* Studies have found that women with high blood pressure have a 3- to 4-fold increased risk of CHD, but that even minor reductions in diastolic blood pressure can have a significant lower the risk of CHD. Among the best ways to reduce hypertension are lifestyle changes, such as increasing physical activity, reducing weight, and decreasing alcohol and salt intake.
- *Quit smoking.* To help female smokers fight their addiction to cigarettes, researchers recommend using nicotine replacement products. They also stress the role of the health practitioner in providing counsel and support.
- *Avoid excess weight gain/obesity.* While there is no direct evidence that losing weight alone reduces the risk of CHD, weight loss does decrease blood pressure and may improve blood cholesterol levels, both of which are important factors for heart disease. As with smoking, researchers note that health care providers can affect their patients by providing information on diet and nutrition and encouraging them to adopt healthy eating habits.
- *Exercise consistently.* Dozens of studies have shown that a lack of exercise can increase the risk of a cardiovascular event, while regular exercise strengthens the heart and increases blood flow. Health care providers should encourage regular exercise as a way to lower the risk of CHD.

References

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