

Think before you drink!

Almost every day we are bombarded by commercials and advertisements for soda and energy drinks. Yet there are a host of reasons why we should not drink them — with the most important one being that they contain huge amounts of sugar and caffeine — things that are very bad for you.

Did you know that sugar is the leading cause of obesity in this country? Not fat ... SUGAR. And soda is loaded with it. The average American today consumes a whopping 150 pounds of sugar per year, because it is added to just about everything we eat. By comparison, our grandparent's generation ate just 25 pounds per person per year. That's a 600 percent increase in just 75 years!

So the next time you're reaching for that soda or energy drink, consider these facts:

- The average soda has no nutritional value — only sugar, carbonated water, artificial color, artificial flavors, caffeine, and other bad ingredients.

- Childhood obesity increases more than 150 percent with each additional daily serving of soda, which adds more sugar to a typical youngster's diet than cookies, candy, and ice cream.

- A Harvard study of young athletes identified a strong association between soda consumption and bone fractures in teenage girls. This is due to the phosphates contained in soda that deplete calcium and lead to brittle bones and osteoporosis.

- An average can of soda has

35-38 mg of caffeine and as much as 13 teaspoons of sugar.

- In addition to high amounts of sugar, energy drinks may contain huge amounts of caffeine (up to 280mg) — almost triple the caffeine in a cup of coffee.

- Because of their high caffeine content energy drinks can boost heart rate and blood pressure, increase anxiety, dehydrate the body, and cause insomnia.

These facts were published in *To Your Health* magazine, facts that everyone should be aware of. Soda should not be in our schools, should not be part of the family dinner, and should not be the beverage of choice at our children's birthday parties. We all need to be aware of its serious health effects. Diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, osteoporosis, and a host of others are all linked with the over-consumption of sugar. Drinking soda and energy drinks just adds fuel to the fire.

And while you're trying to limit (or better yet, eliminate) sugar laden drinks from your diet, you need to know all of the different ways sugar can be hidden in your food. So here's a handy list of names that sugar is commonly disguised as:

- Barley malt
- Blackstrap molasses
- Brown sugar
- Cane sugar
- Corn sweeteners
- Corn syrup
- Date sugar
- Dextrin

- Dextrose
- Evaporated cane juice
- Fructose
- Glucose
- High fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Lactose
- Malt syrup
- Maltodextrin
- Maltose
- Molasses
- Sucrose
- Syrup

My motto is "health literacy is the key to longevity"; and by becoming better educated about the negative health effects of soda, energy drinks, and most importantly sugar, I believe we would all try to reduce the amount we consume. Just think of the dramatic health changes that would occur in this country if everyone reduced their sugar intake by just half. This would add many quality years to our lives and prevent a host of illnesses.

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