WestVirginiaUniversity.
EXTENSION SERVICE

Rethink Your Drink

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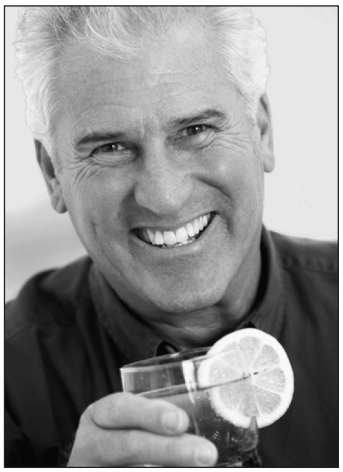
Educational Objectives

1. Learn trends and facts about Americans' beverage choices.
2. Understand how these trends affect our health, wallets and environment.
3. Learn skills to choose healthy drinks for yourself and your family.



Show participants two 5-pound bags of sugar. Ask, "Can you guess why I brought these? This is how much sugar the average American gets from the beverages they consume in a year."

Americans have a huge appetite for sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), and our waistlines, wallets and landfills can prove it. Half of Americans drink sugar-sweetened beverages every day. The World Health Organization, the American Heart Association and other groups urge us to "Rethink your drink!"

Ask participants: How many drinks with added caloric sweeteners can you name? SSBs include soft drinks, sports drinks, coffee, energy drinks, juice drinks, teas, punch, flavored milks and more.

Let's see how much we know about our drink choices. I'll read five statements. Decide if they are true or false. If you think it is true, give a thumbs up. If it is false, give a thumbs down.

1. About two-thirds of added sugars in the average American's diet comes from food. The other one-third comes from sugary beverages. *(True)*
2. Drinking 14 cans of soda pop would be like eating half a pound of sugar. *(False – It is one pound).*
3. Milk has added sugar. *(False – Milk has only natural sugar, unless it's chocolate or flavored milk.)*
4. Your drink choices do not affect your dental health. *(False)*
5. If the average person drinks an extra 12-ounce can of soda pop every day for a year, they will gain 5 pounds. *(False – they will gain 15 pounds.)*

Trends

The average American drinks 39 to 50 gallons of SSBs a year. This is 14 to 17 ounces a day, or 9 to 12 pounds of added sugar in a year.

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In West Virginia, about 38 percent of teens drink soda daily, compared to the national average of 27 percent. Teens and young adults drink the most SSBs, and individuals from low-income households drink more SSBs than those from high-income households. This may be due to the higher price and low availability of healthier options.

Regular soda is the most popular SSB for all ages, while young children often choose juice drinks. The amount of soda sold each year is decreasing, but sports and energy drinks are growing in popularity with adolescents, young adults and adults over age 35.

Bottled water sales are increasing yearly, partly due to consumer preferences for healthier drinks. Beverage companies know that consumers want to lower calories and sugar intake. To boost sales, they advertise low-calorie sodas, as well as ready-to-drink teas, juices, sports drinks and sugar-added or nutrient-enhanced water drinks.

There is interest in products made with natural sugars. However, the non-processed sugars, such as honey and agave nectar, are still added sugars and add calories to the diet.

The sizes of beverage cans and bottles has increased. Before the 1950s, soft drinks were sold in 6.5-ounce bottles. Today, the average size of a soft drink is 20 to 24 ounces. Fountain drinks may be as large as 64 ounces. As the sizes and popularity of SSBs has increased, so has the rate of overweight and obese Americans.

What's in Your Drink?

Be an informed consumer and know what you are buying and drinking! Look on the nutrition label. Show participants these three parts of the label: serving size, grams of sugar and ingredients. Include examples of different beverages.

Activity: Calculate the number of teaspoons of sugar in one serving, as well as the entire container. Measure the amounts and pour sugar into clear cups or containers to make it easy to see.

1. What is the serving size? A container may have more than one serving.
2. How many grams of sugar does it have? What does the number of grams mean? To picture this amount in your mind, calculate grams to teaspoons. Four grams of sugar equals 1 teaspoon. Divide the number of grams of sugar by four. Then, multiply the number of teaspoons by the number of servings. Example: A soda with 24 grams of sugar and two servings has 12 teaspoons of sugar for the whole container (24 grams ÷ 4 = 6 teaspoons of sugar × 2 servings = 12 teaspoons).
3. What ingredients are in your drink? Ingredients are listed by weight, from most to least. Search the list for added

sweeteners such as sugar, high fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, fructose, sucrose, glucose, cane sugar, crystalline fructose or honey. Are there ingredients that surprise you or that you don't know what they are?

Impacts of SSB Consumption

Drink choices have a big impact on personal health, finances and the environment.

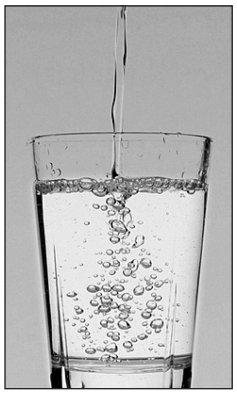
- **Health:** Overconsumption of SSBs, more than any other food or beverage, is associated with unhealthy weight. SSBs have accounted for at least 20 percent of Americans' weight gain in the past 30 years. They are also linked to higher risks of developing type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, gout and certain cancers. Sugars and acids in drinks often lead to costly dental problems. When SSBs replace nutrient-rich milk and foods, additional problems may occur, such as poor bone health. Health problems linked to drinking too many sugary beverages lead to huge costs to individuals, health care organizations and society at large.
- **Finances:** Consuming SSBs can be a drain on a household budget. Buying soda and other beverages is expensive. The average American household spends $850 on soft drinks each year. This is a total of $65 billion dollars nationwide and does not account for other SSBs, such as juice drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, or sweetened coffee and tea beverages.

  Let's use a real-life example to find the cost and ways to save money.

  Suppose a family consumes one 2-liter bottle of soda per person per week. What will this cost? If the family switches to tap water, what would they save? Purchasing and using a refillable water bottle can save money. Energy drinks or specialty coffees are really pricey. An individual who drinks one of these every day could easily spend more than $1,200 a year!
- **Environment:** Think about the environmental costs of Americans' sugar-drinking habits. These facts may surprise you. Did you know . . . ?
  - A household of four can generate 1,460 pieces of garbage a year if each member discards just one SSB bottle a day.
  - Americans throw away 35 billion plastic bottles each year.
  - The volume of plastic thrown away annually around the world is enough to circle the earth four times.
  - Americans represent 5 percent of the world population, but create 30 percent of its garbage.
  - Aluminum cans and plastic bottles can take 200 to 500 years or up to 1,000 years respectively to degrade in a landfill.

Drink containers often end up in landfills or along roadsides. These impacts affect our neighborhoods, communities and beautiful state. Simply switching to reusable water bottles or non-disposables can eliminate the trash and save on environmental costs.

Making Choices



Activity: Ask participants, "What would you choose when eating out?" Let's pretend we are at a fast-food restaurant. I will tell you the drink choices on the menu. Decide if the drink is a healthy choice or not. If the drink is healthy, make the motions like you are drinking it. If the drink has added sugar and is not so healthy, say, "Rethink Your Drink!"

- Diet soda pop (not so healthy)
- Lemon-lime soda pop (not so healthy)
- Bottled water (healthy)
- Cup of water (healthy)
- Bottled sports drink (not so healthy)
- Fountain drink lemonade (not so healthy)
- 100% juice (healthy)
- Sweet tea (not so healthy)
- Low-fat milk (healthy)
- Fruit-infused water (healthy)

We have opportunities every day to make healthy drink choices.

Take a pledge now to help others rethink their drink. Be a role model in your family, community and club organization. Encourage your children, family and friends to try these simple tips:

- Talk with your family about SSBs and their negative health, financial and environmental impacts.
- Make note of day-to-day habits and monitor your progress. Children like to track their choices on a refrigerator chart.
- Drink water and milk with meals.
- Keep a dispenser of water or ready-to-go reusable water bottles handy.
- Make plain water interesting and tasty with slices of favorite fruits, cucumber, mint, etc.
- Dilute juice with sparkling water.
- When you do opt for a sweet drink, go for the smallest size.
- Read labels for these three facts: serving size, grams/teaspoons of sugar and ingredients.
- Think about drinks as part of your overall diet. Choose drinks that nourish your body.

Blackberry Mint Infused Water

(Use any fruit and herb that you think will taste good.)

- 40 blackberries (fresh or frozen)
- 40 mint leaves

Tear mint leaves and smash blackberries to release flavors. Add 1 gallon of ice water. Refrigerate several hours.

Make every sip count. Improve your health, budget and the environment by choosing water and low-fat milk instead of sugar-sweetened beverages.

More Information

WVU Extension Service, *fh.ext.wvu.edu/food/recipes/beverage-recipes/fruit-infused-water.*

California Department of Public Health, *www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/Pages/WICRethinkYourDrink.aspx.*

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