

Soft drinks add extra sugar

Since the beginning of time it seems that humans have had a sweet tooth. In 1947 the average person drank about 100 12 oz. soft drinks per year, or two per week. Fifty years later, that number has climbed to 600 annually, or two per day and the serving size has also grown.

Based on USDA surveys, Americans now average 20.5 teaspoons of added sugar per day—that's 68.5 pounds per year through sugars and syrups added to foods in processing and preparation. This does not include naturally occurring sugars in foods like fruit or milk.

In some age groups, sugar intake is even higher. U.S. teens (11 to 17 years old) consume a daily average of 15 teaspoons of sugar from soft drinks alone. This means 10 percent of teen calories come from carbonated beverages or fruit-flavored juice/sports drinks.

These empty calories lack body building nutrients, like the protein and calcium found in milk. Health experts also believe that soft drink calories are a major contributor to child and teen obesity, as well as expensive dental problems.

Non-diet soft drinks are the No. 1 source of added sugars in the U.S. A single can of regular soda pop contains 150 sugar calories. The 40 grams of sugar in 12 ounces of pop are equal to about 10 teaspoons of sugar.

Consumers are often shocked when they realize that drinking a 12 ounce pop is basically the same as eating a half-cup of table sugar. How's that for a picture? Everyone should sensibly limit their intake of beverages and foods that are high in added sugars. When it comes to added sugars, the nutrition goal is to cut back, not cut out.

Sugary foods and beverages become a health problem when they replace more nutrient-dense choices. When it comes to soft drinks, moderation means a can or less per day. Be encouraged to drink more water and juice. You won't be sorry.