Are Sugar-Sweetened Beverages a Problem?

Policy Brief • September 2019

BACKGROUND

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are beverages that contain any of a variety of added sweeteners. Examples of SSBs are soda, juice drinks, sports and energy drinks, and pre-sweetened tea and coffee drinks. These beverages contain little or no nutrition but they do contain calories, added sugars and, frequently, caffeine, colorings and other chemicals.

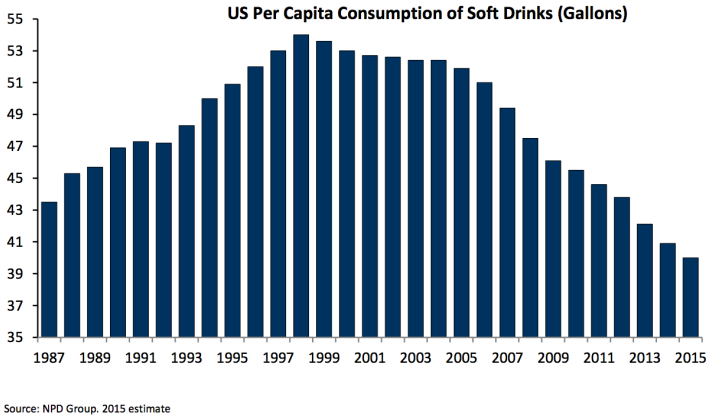
Half of the added sugars in the U.S. diet are from SSBs.

It is well established that SSBs are uniquely harmful to health. SSBs are causally linked to obesity, type 2 diabetes, dental decay, heart disease (stroke, hypertension, dyslipidemia, cardiovascular disease), and metabolic dysfunction (fatty liver disease, insulin resistance). These negative health impacts limit employability and other opportunities, and burden both the individual and state with high healthcare costs.

Decreasing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is a public health priority.

Some say that SSB consumption is down, and ask why obesity rates are still so high?

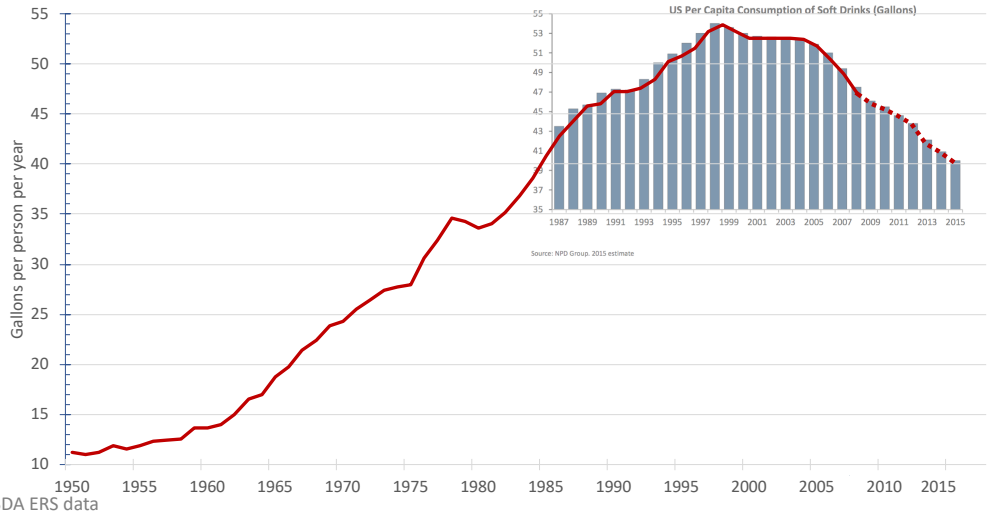
Trends in carbonated soft drink consumption in gallons per person per year



Source: NPD Group. 2015 estimate

Here's why: Americans still consume too much SSBs

Trends in carbonated soft drink consumption in gallons per person per year



USDA ERS data

Graphs: Kristine Madsen, MD, Berkeley School of Public Health, University of California at Berkeley

NATIONAL Drinking Water ALLIANCE

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources

Research for healthy food, people and places

U.S. babies: before the age of 2, one in three babies is already drinking SSBs

-- establishing "sweet" taste preferences and habits (and nearly 1 in 3 drank no water)

On any given day, % of age group consuming:	0-6 months	6-12 months	12-24 months
Water	19%	61%	70%
Sugar-sweetened beverages	--	5%	32%

Based on NHANES 2005-2012 data from: Grimes CA, Szymlek-Gay EA, Nicklas TA. Beverage Consumption among U.S. Children Aged 0–24 Months: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). *Nutrients*. 2017; 9(3):264.

U.S. children and youth: 60% drank SSB yesterday

-- making SSBs among their top single sources of calories (and 1 in 5 drank no water)

On any given day, % of age group consuming:	2-5 years	6-11 years	12-19 years
Water	81%	82%	80%
Sugar-sweetened beverages	47%	63%	65%

Based on NHANES 2013-2014 data from: Bleich SN, Vercammen KA, Koma JW, Li Z. Trends in Beverage Consumption Among Children and Adults, 2003-2014. *Obesity.*2018, 26: 432-441. doi:10.1002/oby.22056

SSB consumption has serious impacts:

- Disease
  - Nearly half of U.S. children and over 2/3 of U.S. adults are overweight or obese
    - *For kids, even one serving a day increases the risk of obesity by 60%*
  - Nearly half of U.S. adults are pre-diabetic or diabetic*
    - *For adults, even one serving a day doubles the risk of diabetes*
    - Nearly 20% of U.S. adolescents are pre-diabetic, a previously rare condition in childhood
- Disparities
  - These numbers are much worse for vulnerable populations – Latinx, African-Americans, and Native Americans – nearly double, in some cases
- Costs
  - SSB-related diseases are a significant burden to the nation, both in health care costs and in reduced human capital
    - Diabetes costs society $327B annually
    - Nearly 1/3 of young Americans are too overweight to serve in the U.S. military

What can Congress do? Support water, the healthy way to hydrate!

- Include measures to improve drinking water safety and access in legislation
- Ask USDA to add a symbol for water to the MyPlate nutrition education graphic

Version with full citations available upon request to ceahecht@ucanr.edu. This work was funded by the WK Kellogg Foundation.

*Includes diagnosed and estimated undiagnosed type 2 diabetes. Disclaimer: Any opinions or recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view or position of the University of California or the WK Kellogg Foundation.