

[IMAGE]

## How Sweet It Isn't

Although they lack many necessary nutrients and accelerate tooth decay, soft drinks have been shown to provide up to one-quarter of all the calories eaten by children and adolescents. Another problem with these beverages is that the more of them kids drink, the less milk and juice they drink. Is soft-drink consumption also associated with eating fewer fruits and vegetables?

More than 500 students in grades four through six in Houston, Texas, provided diet records in their classrooms for 3-7 days. The results of this study, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, showed that sweetened beverages accounted for 51% of the volume of beverages drank by students each day (soft drinks and fruit-flavored drinks were both considered sweetened beverages).

The study also showed that students who drank the most sweetened beverages ate 62% less fruit than students who drank the least. Additionally, those who drank the most sweetened beverages consumed about 330 more calories per day (and consumed more high-fat vegetables) than those who did not consume any sweetened drinks.

Fruits and true fruit juices provide nutrients that reduce risks for sickness and chronic diseases, and not drinking enough of them as a child may lead to bad habits lasting into adulthood. Obviously, if a child is filling up on sugary drinks, he or she won't have room for other, healthier foods and drinks, and may be consuming too many calories in the process.

### *Reference:*

Cullen KW, Ash DM, et al. Intake of soft drinks, fruit-flavored beverages, and fruits and vegetables by children in grades 4 through 6. *American Journal of Public Health* 2002;92(9), pp. 1475-1478.

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