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# KICKING THE SODA HABIT

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For many Americans, drinking soda is probably not the first thing to come to mind when thinking about unhealthy habits. However, Americans who drink sugary sodas daily gain more weight than those who do not.<sup>[i]</sup> Rising consumption of sugary drinks has been a major contributor to the obesity epidemic.<sup>[ii]</sup> Also, people who consume sugary drinks regularly—one to two cans a day or more—have a twenty-six percent greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes than people who rarely have such drinks.<sup>[iii]</sup> Eliminating soda from the workplace is the first step in combating diabetes, obesity, and addiction to caffeine. Several universities and businesses across the country are fighting hard to combat this “sweet” addiction.

Last year, the University of California, San Francisco completely eliminated sugary beverages from its campus, even from fast-food chains, to observe if there are any major metabolic changes in the people who lowered their soda intake.<sup>[iv]</sup> The institution is believed to be one of the largest employers to remove sugary drinks from the workplace.<sup>[v]</sup> Removing the sugary drinks from the university was surprisingly easy, through distribution of educational materials explaining how harmful sugar sweetened beverages can be to health.<sup>[vi]</sup> Though removing sugary soda from U.C.S.F.’s campus was done with ease, reducing soda consumption nationally is a tougher battle.



The soda industry is fighting hard against taxes on sugary drinks. Upon proposal of a tax on soda in Philadelphia, soda lobbyists made campaign contributions to local politicians, staged rallies, and in an effort to burnish its image, made a \$10 million donation to the Children's Hospital of

Philadelphia.<sup>[vii]</sup> Berkeley, California and Philadelphia are some of the only cities to have successfully imposed a tax on soda.<sup>[viii]</sup> Although tax impositions on sugary drinks have yet to be successful nationally, Americans have changed the way they think about soda.<sup>[ix]</sup>

On any given day, half the people in the U.S. consume sugary drinks; one in four get at least 200 calories from such drinks; and five percent get at least 567 calories—equivalent to four cans of soda.<sup>[x]</sup> The other half of Americans, and past soda drinkers, are reaping the benefits of eliminating or reducing their soda intake. In fact, those eliminating soda from their diets may be living longer.<sup>[xi]</sup> Researchers at U.C.S.F. revealed that soda drinkers had shorter telomeres (protective units of DNA that cap the ends of chromosomes in cells) in their white blood cells.<sup>[xii]</sup> Short telomeres have been associated with shorter human lifespan, as well as chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer.<sup>[xiii]</sup> Eliminating soda from the diet could lead to better heart health, stronger teeth, and reduced risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

The best way to quit a habit is to remove it from your environment.<sup>[xv]</sup> To combat the soda problem, universities and businesses across the country should focus on removing or limiting access to sugary drinks on their campuses. In the meantime, Americans should act out against “big soda,” contacting their local government in favor of soda taxes.

[i] Harvard School of Public Health, *Sugary Drinks and Obesity Fact Sheet*, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/sugary-drinks-fact-sheet/>.

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] *Id.*

[iv] Anahad O'Connor, *Putting Sugary Soda Out of Reach*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 3, 2016), <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/08/well/eat/putting-sugary-soda-out-of-reach.html> (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/08/well/eat/putting-sugary-soda-out-of-reach.html>).

[v] *Id.*

[vi] *Id.*

[vii] Margot Sanger-Katz, *The Decline of 'Big Soda'*, N.Y. Times (Oct. 2, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/upshot/soda-industry-struggles-as-consumer-tastes-change.html>.

[viii] O'Connor, *supra* note iv.

[ix] *See id.*

[x] *Supra* note i.

[xi] *See* Jeffrey Norris, *Sugared Soda Consumption, Cell Aging Associated in New Study*, University of California, San Francisco (Oct. 16, 2014), <http://www.ucsf.edu/news/2014/10/119431/sugared-soda-consumption-cell-aging-associated-new-study> (<http://www.ucsf.edu/news/2014/10/119431/sugared-soda-consumption-cell-aging-associated-new-study>).

[xii] *Id.*

[xiii] *Id.*

[xiv] *See* Lecia Bushak, *Bye-Bye Sugary Drinks: This Is What Happens to Your Body When You Stop Drinking Soda*, Medical Daily (Mar. 18 2015), <http://www.medicaldaily.com/bye-bye-sugary-drinks-what-happens-your-body-when-you-stop-drinking-soda-326034>.

[xv] *See* O'Connor, *supra* note iv.

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