Daily Chronicle ONLINE
Your Towns · Your Neighbors | Your Newspaper

Features

February 10, 2008

Think twice before you reach for that diet soda

Diet soda and weight:

People who drink diet soft drinks don't lose weight. In fact, they gain weight, a new study shows. An eight-year study from the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, has found that nearly all the obesity risk from soft drinks comes from drinking diet soda. In fact, there was a 41 percent increase in risk of being overweight for every can or bottle of diet soft drink a person consumed each day.

For consumers of regular soft drinks, the study found the risk of becoming overweight or obese to be:

- 26 percent for up to 1/2 can each day
- 30.4 percent for 1/2-1 can each day
- 32.8 percent for 1-2 cans each day
- 47.2 percent for more than 2 cans each day

For consumers of diet soft drinks, the study found the risk of becoming overweight or obese to be:

- 36.5 percent for up to 1/2 can each day
- 37.5 percent for 1/2-1 can each day
- 54.5 percent for 1-2 cans each day
- 57.1 percent for more than 2 cans each day

The link between diet soda, heart disease and diabetes:

Studies have found that consumption of diet soda is linked to an elevated risk for heart disease and diabetes. This problem may be associated with people saying, “I can eat this cookie because I am drinking this diet soda.”

Diet soda and caffeine:

Another factor to consider before drinking diet pop is its caffeine content. It turns out there is 35-38 milligrams of caffeine per 12-ounce can of most regular colas, or roughly

28 percent of the amount found in an 8-ounce cup of coffee (approximately 130 mg). However, diet colas contain a lot more caffeine:

- Pepsi One = 55.5 mg of caffeine
- Diet Mountain Dew = 55 mg of caffeine
- Diet Coke = 45.6 mg of caffeine
- Diet RC = 43 mg of caffeine
- Diet Dr. Pepper = 41 mg of caffeine
- Diet Sunkist Orange = 41 mg of caffeine
- Diet Pepsi = 36 mg of caffeine

The safety of aspartame:

Finally, a discussion about diet sodas is not complete without talking about the issue of artificial sweeteners, primarily aspartame, which is found in NutraSweet and Equal. This artificial sweetener is one of the most studied, controversial, nonnutritive sweeteners added to foods. It does provide calories, but because it is 160-220 times sweeter than sucrose, very small amounts are needed for sweetening so the caloric intake is minimal. The FDA has set the acceptable daily intake for aspartame at 50 mg/kg of body weight.

Numerous Web sites, books and articles state various reasons why aspartame should not be consumed, while, of course, other people disagree. Interestingly, 100 percent of the research funded by the aspartame industry has found that aspartame is safe, while 92 percent of the research funded by independent companies or labs has found that aspartame is potentially toxic. Seventy-four studies on the safety of aspartame were funded by the aspartame industry (e.g., Monsanto and G.D. Searle).

People who use aspartame have reported many negative health consequences that collectively have been called “aspartame disease.” Along with being connected to these symptoms, aspartame has been linked to fibromyalgia symptoms, spasms, shooting pains, numbness in the legs, cramps, joint pain, depression, anxiety, vision problems and other diseases. One study confirmed that people who experienced headaches after consuming a food containing aspartame were having them because of the aspartame. And there have been links between the intake of aspartame and several different kinds of cancer.

Once again, as with the trial and error of our medications, we find ourselves human guinea pigs, this time experimenting with our diet. For many, aspartame may turn out to be a life-saving alternative to that well-documented “sweet poison,” sugar. Others who continue to experience depression, fatigue and other symptoms, however, may want to moderate their aspartame consumption and see what happens.