

Sugary beverages linked to reduced metabolic efficiency

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Video Abstract

Keywords: Protein, Sugar-sweetened, Fat utilization, Substrate oxidation, Energy metabolism, Diet induced thermogenesis, Non-nutritive sweetened

Posted Date: March 16th, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-334396/v1>

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Abstract

Before you reach for that sugary beverage at dinner tonight, consider this: consuming just one sugar-sweetened drink with a meal not only adds calories to your diet, it also reduces the body's metabolic efficiency. That's the finding of a new study published in the journal, *BMC Nutrition*. There is increasing evidence that the macronutrient composition of the diet may be more important in preventing obesity than previously thought. In other words, it's not just *how much* you eat, but also *what combination* of foods you eat that's important for maintaining a healthy body weight. Obesity has become a world-wide epidemic. In the US, the increased prevalence of this disease has been linked to the American diet, in which sugar plays a starring role. To better understand this, a team of USDA researchers set out to determine how adding a small serving of a sugar-sweetened beverage to meals impacts appetite, food preferences, energy expenditure, and the ability to burn fat. By standardizing the meals and differing them in only dietary protein content, the team was able to isolate the effects of sugar and protein intake on these categories, all of which contribute to weight gain. They found that increasing protein content decreased hunger but had no effect on cravings for sweet foods. The consumption of even a single sugary drink markedly reduced energy efficiency and suppressed the body's ability to burn fat, independent of the meal's protein content. What's more, about one-third of the additional calories provided by the drink were not expended. This study provides an important addition to the growing body of evidence implicating sugar as a significant driver of obesity. As the largest single source of added sugar in the American diet, sugar-sweetened beverages represent a challenging obstacle in the fight against this disease.