



Stop the Pop?

As executives, you've heard it before. Sodas, aka Pop, are bad for you. They contain excessive calories leading to obesity, sugars and acids that rot your teeth and phosphorus which can deplete your bones of calcium. Diet sodas aren't much healthier either. Artificial sweeteners are under scrutiny, and as with regular sodas, caffeine is an issue with some diet sodas having up to 56 milligrams of caffeine per 12 oz serving. With those ingredients, it certainly seems soda consumption is a poor beverage choice for executives concerned about their health.

What people may not know is that carbonated drinks were originally created as a restorative dietary supplement. For centuries, natural sparkling mineral waters were considered healthful, but hard to access. So scientists began searching for a man-made version of these bubbly waters. By the 1700s artificially carbonated waters were offered in pharmacies throughout the world, and like Arabic chemists in medieval times, American pharmacists added medicinal and flavorful herbs including birch bark, dandelion, sarsaparilla, and fruit extracts. By the late 1800's, syrup made in part from the leaves of the coca plant and the caffeine-laced juice of kola nuts was created to reduce headaches, later becoming what we today know as Coca-Cola.

Soon customers wanted to bring their "healthful" drinks home, and the bottling industry responded in the late 1800s by developing bottles that could successfully maintain the bubbles.

Fast forward to current times where consumers can select from a vast array of beverages including carbonated sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks, ready-to-drink teas, and vitamin waters. Consumption of these drinks is startling. In 2008, sales were of more than 14 billion gallons of soft drinks. Putting into perspective, that's an equivalent of about 1.4 12-oz. servings per day, for every man, woman, and child.

Just how bad are soft drinks? Some argue that sodas are nothing more than sugar water, leading to obesity and worse. Yet the soft drink industry and many studies state differently. For example, while phosphorus can leach calcium from bones, The National Academy of Sciences has set 4 grams (or 4,000 milligrams) per day as the tolerable upper limit for people 9 years and older. Since a 12-ounce can of soda averages only about 30 milligrams,



you'd have to drink at least 100 cans per day. What about sugar and obesity? According to Michael Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and author of a timely report on soft drinks called "Liquid Candy: How Soft Drinks Are Harming Americans' Health, "It's hard to pull out the health effects of soft drinks from the whole diet," he says." "There are relatively few studies on sugars. And some studies don't distinguish between naturally occurring sugars and refined sugars."

As for the afternoon jolt most executives enjoy to stay sharp - the soft drink industry counters that "the long history of caffeine's use confirms that it is safe when consumed in moderation." And while the soft drink industry does admit that soda contributes to tooth decay, data indicates that it is just one of many cavity contributors in our modern diet.

If you can't give it up - choose your soda carefully. Avoid formulations with high fructose syrup or artificial sweeteners, excessive caffeine, and sodium benzoate. Look for carbonated drinks containing juices or natural flavorings. If weight is a consideration, plain sparkling water with a squeeze of lemon or lime can be a refreshing substitute. For dietary concerns or questions about the best beverage choice for your lifestyle, make an appointment with your doctor at Executive MD.

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