

# America's Drinking Problem

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“Water is the premium beverage for the human brain and body,” I began. “After oxygen, it is the most important nutrient.”

Indeed, the body is composed of over 70% water—the brain of around 86% water. Water is essential for a host of reasons including proper digestion and circulation, numerous chemical reactions, absorption of nutrients, waste elimination, flexibility of blood vessels, regulation of body temperature, internal moisturization of the skin, and for preventing premature aging due to toxic buildup.

My topic for the annual Health and Nutrition Convention was water intake, dehydration, and brain function. Glancing around the room I noticed many more cans and bottles of soft drinks than bottles of water.

“America has a drinking problem,” I continued; “one that has nothing to do with alcoholic beverages.” That was as far as I got before the first interruption.

“Personally, I don’t think it matters what I drink as long as I get sufficient fluid every day,” said one young woman.

“It’s a myth that all liquids supply adequate hydration,” I said. “Typical alternative beverages carry with them potentially deleterious effects. Some tend to dehydrate due to high caffeine and sugar content; others contain neurotoxins in the form of artificial sweeteners such as Aspartame; some actually steal micronutrients from the body.”

“I’m Eric” said a young man, rising to his feet, “and I drink the equivalent of at least four 12-ounce glasses of water every day in Pepsi and 7-Up. I challenge anyone to say that isn’t okay!”

“It’s your brain and your choice, Eric,” I replied. “As a brain function specialist, my goal is to share data from the Centers for Disease Control and statistics from the National Soft Drink Association (NSDA). You take it from there.” He nodded and sat down.

“America’s *drinking problem* involves a failure on the part of its human inhabitants to drink sufficient quantities of water, the premium beverage. This often leads to dehydration,” I explained, “which is lethal for both brain and body.” Just a 2% drop in your brain-body water supply can trigger:

- Fuzzy short-term memory
- Trouble with basic math
- Difficulty focusing on smaller print, such as a computer screen
- Daytime fatigue (dehydration is one of the most common causes).

The sensations for hunger and thirst are similar and easily confused. Parents often feed a child when it is thirsty (not hungry) and the child learns to eat for both sensations. In adulthood, many are thirsty for water but think they are hungry so snack instead or drink food (e.g., milk, fruit juices) or sodas and other sugary drinks.

Unfortunately, alternative beverages (e.g., fruit drinks, sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks, sugary drinks) appear largely to have replaced water in the lives of many Americans.

- Estimates are that about 50% of the US population above the age of two consumes sugary drinks on any given day
- Soft-drink consumption in the US has doubled for females and tripled for males since the late 1970’s
- Males ages 12-19 years have the highest soft-drink consumption, averaging half a gallon a day or 160 gallons a year (more than any other demographic)

- Consumption of soft drinks now exceeds 600 12-ounce servings per person per year
- Low-income persons consume more sugary drinks in relation to their overall diet than those with higher incomes

An area of high concern for brain function relates to the content of soft drinks as compared with pure water. Some relative nutritional-fact tables have listed 40 grams of sugar and upwards per 12-ounces of popular soft drinks. Refined sugar is considered a neurotoxin. The American Heart Association has suggested that the intake of refined sugar products be limited to a maximum of 25 grams for women and 37.5 grams for men. Diet sodas have their own risks. Although lower in sugar (e.g., ranges are often between 9-15 grams of sugar per 12-ounces), many are high in sodium, which may cause more calcium to be excreted in the urine and increase the risk of osteoporosis.

Sugary drinks have been linked to poor diet quality and type 2 diabetes (in adults). The United States dietary guidelines for 2010 recommended limiting the consumption of foods and beverages with added sugars, while the American Heart Association suggested a consumption goal of fewer than three 12-oz cans of carbonated cola—per week.

Weight gain and obesity are also concerns. The relationship between soft drink consumption and body weight is so strong that researchers calculate that for each additional soft drink consumed, the risk of obesity increases 1.6 times. Estimates are that one extra soft drink a day gives a child a 60 percent greater chance of becoming obese.

Other commonly associated health risks include nutritional deficiencies, tooth decay and enamel destruction, osteoporosis and bone fractures, heart disease, food addictions, blood sugar / other eating disorders, neurotransmitter dysfunction from chemical sweeteners, a decrease in the antibacterial action of penicillin and ampicillin, and neurological and adrenal disorders from excessive caffeine.

Some are concerned about acidity versus alkalinity. Rain water has an approximate pH level of 5.5, which is on the acidic side of neutral (e.g., anything lower than 7.0 is typically considered acidic). Human blood, on the other hand, leans toward alkalinity at somewhere around a pH of 7.5. Soft drinks tend to fall within the acidic pH range, often hovering in the neighborhood of a pH level of 3. One theory is that the more acidic one's intake, the harder the body has to work to achieve optimum acid-alkaline balance.

"Water is your premium beverage!" I said, concluding my presentation. "For your brain-body health, avoid being part of America's drinking problem."

As I made my way to the back of the lecture hall I heard someone call my name. It was Eric. "Thanks for not badgering me to give up soft drinks."

"You're welcome," I replied, "especially since that would be none of my business."

"Well," he continued, "since listening to your presentation I've decided to replace one or two soft drinks a day with water. Would that please you?"

"It would likely please your brain," I responded, laughing. He smiled a crooked and rather charming smile and then was gone.

Do you want to better your health? Evaluate your *drinking habits*. Choose water as your premium beverage. It is nature's best means of quenching your thirst and helping to keep your brain and body healthy.

