

Americans Are Putting Down the Soda Pop

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Sugar-sweetened drinks are not as popular as they once were.

According to a new study based on a continuing national health survey, 60.7 percent of children and 50 percent of adults drank a sugary beverage on any given day in 2014, down from 79.7 percent of children and 61.5 percent of adults in 2003.

The study, published in the journal *Obesity*, relied on a representative sample of 18,000 children 2 to 19 years old, and 27,652 adults aged 20 and older. They were asked about their beverage consumption over the past 24 hours: juice, milk, sugar and diet soda, coffee and tea, sports drinks, water and alcohol.

Per capita consumption of all drinks declined. Children took in 312.6 drink calories a day in 2014, compared with 473.8 a day in 2003. Among adults, the figure was 341.1 calories in 2014, compared with 425.0 in 2003.

Most of that decline was driven by a reduction in the number of people drinking sugar-sweetened beverages, and lower consumption among those who did still drink them. Over the 12 years of the study, milk was the favorite drink for children aged 2 to 11; adolescents and adults still got most of their drink calories from sweetened soda and other sugary beverages.

Coffee and tea consumption was steady, and alcohol consumption remained generally the same among adults over the years, with a slight but statistically insignificant increase in people over age 60.

In every age group, water drinking increased. Sara N. Bleich, a professor of public health policy at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and lead author of the new study, said that this is probably because soda drinkers are switching to water.

The consumption of 100 percent fruit juice also declined, most sharply among adolescents and those over age 40. "There are a number of studies showing that juice is linked to obesity risk," Dr. Bleich said, "so kids should be eating fruit rather than drinking fruit juice."

Dr. Bleich offered several possible reasons for the declining consumption of sugary drinks: wide publicity about the dangers of obesity, changes to food allowances in federal nutrition programs, improvements in school lunch menus and reformulations of some foods by manufacturers and retailers. The soda tax now imposed in a few cities has had an effect, too, she said.

"Even though we're seeing declines," Dr. Bleich said, "consumption is still highest among blacks, Hispanics and adolescents, and these groups are at higher risk for obesity."