Getting off colas, sodas, pop, fizz...oh, whatever! [1]

Dear Alice

I drink a lot of soda in my diet and I want to stop. Can you tell me some of the problems that drinking soda can cause, and some tips on how to stop?

? Cokehead

Answer

Dear Cokehead,

Drinking too much of the bubbly? Regular soda (not diet) is a source of sugar, caffeine, sometimes caramel coloring, and little else. A 12-ounce can of regular soda typically contains approximately 150 calories and 40 grams of sugar. The American Heart Association [2] recommends that men limit their added sugar intake to nine teaspoons (or 36 grams) per day and women get no more than six teaspoons (or 24 grams) of added sugar per day. One can of pop?er, soda, can throw that recommendation to the curb! In addition, when consuming a soda, you are getting empty calories. That is, the soda is providing no other nutritious, good-for-you stuff ? just good old calories and carbohydrates. True, these carbs can be used by the body for energy; however, if consumed in excess, sugar/carbs can contribute to weight gain.

Besides that, the sugar and acid in soda can increase your chances for cavities. Acid can wear down tooth enamel and cause tooth decay. Enamel is the thin, outer layer of hard tissue that helps maintain the tooth's shape and structure. Certain sodas also contain caffeine. If you're bothered by headaches, restlessness or anxiety, you may want to take a closer look at just how much caffeine you get in a typical day. One (12 oz) can of a cola product has about half the caffeine as a cup of coffee. On the upside, caffeine can improve mental alertness and provide a quick pick-me-up. Much research on the long-term effects of caffeine has found that two cups of coffee per day has little or no negative health consequences. However, too much caffeine can cause anxiety and/or sleep loss. Also, caffeine increases stomach acid levels, which can cause stomach irritation.
In terms of "quitting" soda, going cold turkey can be difficult. The good news is that you can feel physically and mentally better after an initial period of adjustment. Start the quitting process by cutting down on the amount of soda you drink each day. Do this for a few weeks and gradually reduce your intake until you aren't drinking any soda. Headaches, lethargy, and/or simply feel the "blues" are all normal parts of the cutting back process. In the meantime, here are some alternatives to soda that you can try:

- Seltzer with a little unsweetened cranberry or grape juice
- Unsweetened, non-caloric flavored seltzers
- Plain tap water with lemon juice and an optional one to two teaspoons of sugar

Keeping a journal of your soda consumption can be helpful in making you aware of how much soda you are actually drinking. How much soda you consume may surprise you. You might also try quitting with a friend. Having a buddy around can help make the quitting process easier, and even a fun challenge. Lastly, if you're thirsty and there's nothing else around, it can become easy to pop some coins in the closest soda machine. Keeping alternative beverages around, like water or seltzer, can help quench your cravings. Cheers to that!

Alice!

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