

New findings highlight bias in research on health benefits of non-alcoholic drinks

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Researchers from the Children 's Hospital, Boston, USA and the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington, D. C., USA, have found that there is a high potential for research findings into non-alcoholic drinks to be affected by bias from companies providing funding.

Previous studies on the relationship between funding source of pharmaceutical trials have shown that the outcome of published research often favors the funding organizations. However, it has not previously been clear how much this bias extends beyond drug research.

The researchers, led by David S. Ludwig, examined 206 review and research articles, published between January 1999 and December 2003, which discussed soft drinks, fruit juices, and milk, and categorized them in relation to their health outcomes, as well as by who funded the study. The relation between the funding and the outcomes was then examined.

There was a strong association between the source of the funding for these studies and the conclusions that were drawn. Research funded completely by food and drink companies was approximately four to eight times more likely to produce results which were favorable to these companies, compared with studies with no industry funding.

This research was confined to just soft drinks, juice, and milk, and hence without further studies it is important not to extrapolate the results to other types of food. However, the authors conclude that "Industry funding of nutrition-related scientific articles may bias conclusions in

favor of sponsors' products, with potentially significant implications for public health."

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