

How to kick a soda habit

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Soda is loaded with more calories, sugar and chemicals than many people realize. Here are nutritionists' tips for cutting it out - or at least down:

- Get some perspective. Estimate how much soda you drink in a week (if you have no idea, keep a food diary for seven days). Then use a calculator to add up how many calories and sugar grams your habit costs you.
- Give yourself time. Most people can't go cold turkey. One strategy is to cut back by 25 percent the first week, 50 percent the second week, and so on.
- Find other fizz. Seltzer water, mineral water and club soda all have the same feel on your tongue as soda. Experiment by mixing them into small amounts of 100 percent fruit juices.
- Find other sweets. When you crave a sugary taste, eat a piece of fruit or chew some sugarless gum.
- Drink lots of water. Buy a refillable water cooler and keep it with you at home, at work and in the car.
- Stock up on alternatives. Decaffeinated tea and flavored water are top

choices for your refrigerator. Some 100 percent fruit juice also is good, but be aware that juices have calories and sugar too.

- Switch to diet - maybe. Nutritionists are mixed on diet soda, which is calorie-free but still contains chemicals and may increase cravings for sweet foods. If you want to switch, try mixing some diet soda into regular, gradually increasing the ratio as your taste buds adjust. Note: some say diet soda from a fountain tastes better at first than drinking from cans or bottles.
- Prepare yourself. You may be addicted not only to soda's taste but to the caffeine in some brands. Withdrawal symptoms may include fatigue and irritability.

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