

Researcher finds surprising link between sugar in drinks and blood pressure

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Research led by Liwei Chen, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor of Public Health at LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans, has found that there is an association between sugary drinks and blood pressure and that by cutting daily consumption of sugary drinks by just one serving a day, people can lower their blood pressure. The research is published online in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

"We found no association for diet beverage consumption or [caffeine intake](#) and blood pressure," notes Dr. Chen, "suggesting that sugar may actually be the nutrient that is associated with blood pressure and not caffeine which many people would suspect."

The research, which was supported by a grant from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, analyzed [dietary intake](#) and blood pressure of 810 adults measured at baseline, 6 and 18 months. After known risk factors of high blood pressure were controlled for, a reduction in sugar-sweetened beverage consumption of one serving per day was associated with a drop of 1.8 mm Hg in systolic pressure and 1.1 mm Hg in diastolic blood pressure over 18 months.

After additional adjustment for weight change over the same period, a reduction in the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages was still significantly associated with blood pressure reduction.

"By reducing the amount of sugar in your diet, you are also reducing the number of calories you consume and may lose weight," adds Dr. Chen.

"But even among those whose weight was stable, we still found that people who drank fewer sugary sodas lowered their blood pressure."

Elevated blood pressure continues to be one of the most common and important problems in the United States. According to the American Heart Association, about 74.5 million people in the United States, or one in three people, age 20 and older have high blood pressure. It is estimated that high blood pressure killed 56,561 Americans in 2006. From 1996 to 2006, the death rate from high blood pressure increased 19.5 percent, and the actual number of deaths rose 48.1 percent.

Normal blood pressure, measured in millimeters of mercury, is defined as systolic (top number) less than 120 and diastolic (bottom number) less than 80. High blood pressure (hypertension) is a systolic pressure of 140 or higher and a diastolic pressure of 90 or higher. Pressures falling in the range between are considered to be prehypertension.

[High blood pressure](#), which usually has few symptoms, if any, is an established risk factor for stroke, cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, and shortened life expectancy.

"More research is needed to establish the causal relationship, but in the meantime, people can benefit right now by reducing their intake of [sugary drinks](#) by at least one serving per day," concludes Dr. Chen.

Provided by Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

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