

Beverage calories shock consumers

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Americans may like their drinks "sickeningly sweet," but a new labeling initiative may discourage us from gulping unnecessary calories, said Jessica Bartfield, MD, medical weight-loss specialist at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital.

As of February, the front labels of packaged beverages now include the total number of [calories](#) in containers of 20 ounces or less. The beverage industry began this initiative in support of First Lady Michelle Obama's campaign to fight childhood obesity.

"Liquid caloric consumption can be quite a significant contribution to weight gain, so this is a tremendous effort to educate the public," said Dr. Bartfield, who is part of the Loyola University Health System's physician-led team of exercise physiologists, nutritionists and psychologists who work together to change the behaviors of those who are significantly overweight.

"Beverage containers traditionally 'hid' the nutritional content at the back in a small square with small print and cleverly listed just the calorie content per serving," Bartfield said.

"Unbeknownst to those who are happily guzzling their favorite cola or fruit drink, most packaged beverages contain multiple servings, and most Americans fail to do the math on the total calorie count," she said.

Dr. Bartfield's top 3 "sickeningly sweet" statistics include:

1 – Just A Spoonful of Sugar - “The average American consumes 22.5 teaspoons of added sugar daily, half of which comes from regular soda and fruit drinks, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey,” conducted from 1999 to 2004, she said.

2 – Sugar On Top – “About 10 percent of overweight adults consume 450 calories of sugar-sweetened beverages per day, which is three times that of an average American. Cutting 450 calories per day would lead to about a 1 pound per week weight loss, close to 50 pounds in one year.”

3 - Babies and Beverages – “A study from the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that reduction in sugar-sweetened [beverages](#) (regular soda, fruit drinks and fruit punch) had a significant effect on weight change at 6 months and 18 months, even more of an impact than solid-calorie reduction.”

Message in a Bottle

Chicagoan Aaron Villarreal, 35, regularly drank about 12 cans of cola every day before joining the Gottlieb Medical Weight Loss Program when his weight topped out at 350 pounds.

"I was stunned when the nutritionist poured white sugar in a measuring cup to show me how much sugar I was drinking in just one day," he said. Villarreal cut cola from his diet and lost 5 pounds in one week.

"Seeing that one small change make such a dramatic difference encouraged me to improve my diet in other ways and to add exercise," Villarreal said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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