

Soft drink consumption linked to behavioral problems in young children

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Americans buy more soft drinks per capita than people in any other country. These drinks are consumed by individuals of all ages, including very young children. Although soft drink consumption is associated with aggression, depression, and suicidal thoughts in adolescents, the relationship had not been evaluated in younger children. A new study scheduled for publication in *The Journal of Pediatrics* finds that aggression, attention problems, and withdrawal behavior are all associated with soft drink consumption in young children.

Shakira Suglia, ScD, and colleagues from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, University of Vermont, and Harvard School of Public Health assessed approximately 3,000 5-year-old children enrolled in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a prospective [birth cohort](#) that follows mother-child pairs from 20 large U.S. cities. Mothers reported their child's soft drink consumption and completed the Child Behavior Checklist based on their child's behavior during the previous two months. The researchers found that 43% of the children consumed at least 1 serving of soft drinks per day, and 4% consumed 4 or more.

Aggression, withdrawal, and attention problems were associated with [soda consumption](#). Even after adjusting for sociodemographic factors, [maternal depression](#), [intimate partner violence](#), and paternal incarceration, any soft drink consumption was associated with increased aggressive behavior. Children who drank 4 or more soft drinks per day were more than twice as likely to destroy things belonging to others, get

into fights, and physically attack people. They also had increased attention problems and withdrawal behavior compared with those who did not consume soft drinks.

According to Dr. Suglia, "We found that the child's aggressive behavior score increased with every increase in soft drinks servings per day." Although this study cannot identify the exact nature of the association between soft drink consumption and problem behaviors, limiting or eliminating a child's soft drink consumption may reduce behavioral problems.

More information: "Soft Drinks Consumption Is Associated with Behavior Problems in 5-Year-Olds," by Shakira F. Suglia, ScD, Sara Solnick, PhD, and David Hemenway, PhD, appears in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, [DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2013.06.023](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2013.06.023)

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