

Intervention helps adults reduce sugary beverage intake, study shows

April 29 2016, by Mike Krings

While millions of adults consume several hundred calories in sugary drinks every day, most of the messages about the dangers of overconsumption of sweet beverages focus on the risks they present children. A University of Kansas researcher has co-authored a study showing an intervention aimed at educating adults about the dangers of sugary beverages and improving their health and media literacy is effective at improving their health, knowledge and helping reduce the amount of beverages they drink.

Yvonne Chen, associate professor of journalism, was part of a team that tested two methods of reducing sugary drink intake among adults living in rural areas in southwest Virginia. An intervention known as SIPsmartER, which educated participants about the dangers of excess consumption, proved to be an effective method in helping individuals reduce their daily intake while also improving health measures such as [body mass index](#), known as BMI, weight, cholesterol and quality of life measured in the number of unhealthy days per month. MoveMore, a program designed to encourage increased [physical activity](#), showed much smaller improvements in those areas.

Most interventions in sugary drink consumption focus on children, assuming adults have choices in the drinks they consume.

"That's not always entirely true, especially for people living in medically underserved communities and who have a low health literacy," Chen said. "We wanted to test a practical solution that people can use in their

own, everyday lives."

The researchers worked with nearly 300 adults who all consumed higher-than-average amounts of [sugary drinks](#) per day and were able to exercise. The SIPsmartER participants averaged 496 calories and 43 fluid ounces of sugary drink consumption per day at the start of the study. After six months, those numbers reduced to 268 and 24, respectively. Chen co-authored the study with Jamie Zoellner, Valisa Hedrick, Wen You, Brenda Davy, Kathleen Porter, Hannah Lane and Ramine Alexander of Virginia Tech University; Angie Bailey of Rowan University; and Paul Estabrooks of the University of Nebraska. It was published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*.

Participants in both interventions took part in three face-to-face classes in six months and took part in 11 phone calls discussing various aspects of sugary drink consumption, health and media literacy, based on goals they set. The SIPsmartER in-person lessons discussed health risks of excessive consumption, analysis of media messages regarding sweetened beverages and the financial toll of consuming large amounts of sweet drinks. The MoveMore lessons focused on exercise, understanding the financial investment of sugary drink manufacturers and understanding persuasive tools used in media messaging.

After six months, media literacy scores for both groups improved, with SIPsmartER participants improving their scores by 8.2 points on average, compared with a 2.9 point average improvement in MoveMore.

"They see these messages trying to sell sugary drinks everywhere in their lives," Chen said of participants. "With the media and health literacy training they became more skeptical about how pervasive these messages are and how they could talk back to the industry."

Physical improvements abounded as well, as SIPsmartER participants

reported having fewer unhealthy days per month after six months, as well as reducing their BMI, weight and cholesterol levels, as well as sugary drink intake at higher rates than MoveMore participants.

"We concluded SIPsmartER is a more effective intervention, and it's reflected in the BMI, sugary drink intake and weight reduction. All showed a significant difference," Chen said.

The researchers recently collected data from participants 18 months after the study began and will analyze data to see how well the improvements were maintained at longer intervals. They also hope to adapt the successful intervention for easier implementation at clinical sites, for use with smaller groups of individuals. The media literacy and health components work well together for individuals looking to improve their health through reduced sugary drink consumption.

"I think, especially for medically underserved communities, this approach is effective. In this part of the country, many people were concerned about water quality and safety of well water vs. city water and thinking sugary drinks were a safe alternative," Chen said. "We know media has become very pervasive in daily life, and showing participants ways to be critical of media messages can help manage what they experience. It's a very practical approach, and we know it can reach underserved populations who deserve a better quality of life."

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: Intervention helps adults reduce sugary beverage intake, study shows (2016, April 29) retrieved 5 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-04-intervention-adults-sugary-beverage-intake.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.