



NEWS

25,000 US Deaths Linked to Sugary Drinks



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In a study that's sure to shake up [the soda ban debate](#), Harvard researchers have linked the sugary drinks to 180,000 deaths a year worldwide, 25,000 in the United States alone.

"We know that sugar-sweetened beverages are linked to obesity, and that a large number of deaths are caused by obesity-related diseases. But until now, nobody had really put these pieces together," said Gitanjali Singh, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston and lead author of the study presented today at the American Heart Association's annual meeting in New Orleans.

Singh and colleagues spent five years putting the pieces together. Using data from national health surveys around the world, the team tied sugar-sweetened beverages to 133,000 deaths from diabetes, 44,000 deaths from cardiovascular diseases and 6,000 deaths from cancer in 2010.

The study adds to [mounting evidence](#) that sugar-sweetened beverages, loaded with calories that carry little nutritional value, are a public health hazard.

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“I think our findings should really impel policymakers to make effective policies to reduce sugary beverage consumption since it causes a significant number of deaths,” said Singh, adding that she thinks “cause” is an appropriate word despite the limitations of the association study.

The American Beverage Association criticized the study, which has yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, calling it “more about sensationalism than science.”

“It does not show that consuming sugar-sweetened beverages causes chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease or cancer – the real causes of death among the studied subjects,” the industry group [said in a statement](#). “The researchers make a huge leap when they take beverage intake calculations from around the globe and allege that those beverages are the cause of deaths which the authors themselves acknowledge are due to chronic disease.”

The study comes one week after [a judge blocked](#) New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s proposed ban on supersized sodas, and one day after Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant [signed a bill](#) preventing municipalities from setting limits on soda and salt content.

“It is simply not the role of government to micro-regulate citizens’ dietary decisions,” Bryant said in a statement. “The responsibility for one’s personal health depends on individual choices about a proper diet and appropriate exercise.”

But some experts say evidence-based policies could curb soda consumption and save lives. Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, senior author of the new study, said he now plans to study the effects of sugary drink regulation and taxation on health and health care costs.

“I think that’s the kind of information that policymakers need,” said Mozaffarian, who is an epidemiologist at the Harvard School of Public Health.

In the meantime, Americans can take steps on their own to cut sugary drinks and shed pounds.

“It may not be easy at first, but your body will thank you,” said

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/richard-besser/>

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/richard-besser/> ABC News’ chief health and medical editor Dr. Richard Besser. “Study after study links intake of sugary drinks to poor health effects.”

“It is quite frightening to see the rise in chronic diseases as people around the world consume more and more sugary drinks,” Besser added. “It reminds me of the way lung cancer is on the rise around the world as more and more people smoke cigarettes.”