

## Soft Drinks - the drinks of champions?

One of the most heavily promoted and "coolest" products around are soft drinks. Millions are spent on superstars advertising coke, pepsi and the like. We know they are not healthy but how damaging is that innocent - and many would say satisfying - can of coke to our health?

In the following article I will outline:

1. The current soft drink epidemic
2. The ingredients
3. The physical cost from soft drink ingredients

### 1. The current soft drink epidemic

In the U.K. in 2004 nearly 14 billion litres of soft drink were consumed. The 2004 total soft drinks figure represents an increase of 47% over the past ten years. (1)

In Australia soft drink consumption increased by over 30% in the 10 years to 1999. 50% of 16-18 year olds consumed soft drinks every day. (2)

These popular beverages account for more than a quarter of all drinks consumed in the United States. More than 56.9 billion liters were sold in 2000 - that works out to at least one can per day for every man, woman and child. Soft drink consumption among children and adolescents rose 41% between 1989-1991 and 1994-1995, mostly displacing milk and juice, the leading sources of many vitamins and minerals in the American diet. (3)

### 2. The ingredients

One can of soft drink has about:

- 10-13 teaspoons of sugar
- 30 to 55 mg of caffeine
- And additionally it is loaded with artificial food colors and sulphites

### 3. Physical costs from soft drink ingredients

- **Sugar:** Soft drink manufacturers are the largest single user of refined sugar in the United States. It is a proven fact that sugar increases insulin levels, which can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, premature aging and numerous other negative side effects including associated tooth disease problems.

- **Caffeine:** Caffeinated drinks cause many nervous system reactions including the jitters and insomnia. High caffeine use is associated with high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, elevated blood cholesterol levels, vitamin and mineral depletion that potentially leads to disease.

- **Aspartame:** This chemical is used as a sugar substitute in diet soda. There are over 92 different health side effects associated with aspartame consumption including brain tumors, birth defects, diabetes, emotional disorders and epilepsy/seizures. Further, when aspartame is stored for long periods of time or kept in warm areas it changes to methanol, an alcohol that converts to formaldehyde and formic acid, which are known carcinogens. Please see February and March Peak Performance editions to read more on this deadly product.

- **Phosphoric Acid:** May interfere with the body's ability to use calcium, which can lead to osteoporosis or softening of the teeth and bones. Phosphoric acid also neutralizes the hydrochloric acid in your stomach, which can interfere with digestion, making it difficult to utilize nutrients. (4)

- **Benzene:** Recent random government testing of soft drinks found five of them contaminated with levels of benzene (which is a cancer-causing chemical linked to leukemia) that exceeded federal standards set for benzene in drinking water. Benzene is able to form in beverages that contain vitamin C (ascorbic acid) and the preservatives sodium benzoate or potassium benzoate. Exposure to heat and light can trigger the formation. (5)

Looking at the consumption statistics and related health consequences I have no doubt soft drinks are one of the main reasons from a nutritionally perspective why many people suffer health problems. Aside from the negative effects of the soda itself, drinking a lot of it is likely to leave you with little appetite for whole foods that your body needs to function at its best.

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