

Study finds no link between sugar drinks and kiddie obesity

By staff reporter

7/6/2007 - A new study from the UK suggests that children consumption of soft drinks between age five and seven is not linked to obesity later in childhood, challenging previous studies that have targeted soft drinks as a major driver in the obesity epidemic.

The research used data from a sub-sample of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, and found that consumption of sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) during childhood was not associated with fatness at age nine.

Writing in the journal *Nutrition*, researchers from MRC Human Nutrition Research, Cambridge and the University of Bristol report that heavier children tended to consume more low-energy beverages, possibly as a result of parental attempts to curb their child's calorie intake.

"Our analysis shows no evidence for an association between SSB consumption at age 5 or 7 y and fat mass at age 9 y in this cohort of British children," wrote lead author Laura Johnson.

"In this prospective analysis the relation between consumption of low-energy beverages and high fat mass at age 9 y, which is explained by overweight at 5 and 7 y, suggests that heavier children may consume low-energy beverages as part of an ineffective weight-control program," she added.

The rate of childhood obesity is set to double by the end of the decade, says new forecasts by the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF). The alarming figures on childhood obesity estimate that by 2010 almost 287 million kids will be obese, and the overall obese population could rise to 700 million by 2015.

The overall number of overweight people worldwide could top two billion, said the task force - without taking account a lower overweight threshold set for Asians.

The World Health Organization has implicated SSB consumption as a "probable contributor" to the obesity epidemic, and to the British research set out to assess whether consumption increases fatness in British children aged five (521 subjects) and seven (682 subjects). Beverages were classified as SSB, low energy, fruit juice, milk, and water.

Johnson and co-workers report that 33 per cent of the five-year olds and 38 per cent the seven year olds consumed SSBs, and the drink accounted for three per cent of the total energy intake for both age groups.

The researchers no evidence that consumption of the SSBs at either age five or seven was associated with fatness at age nine, measured using dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry.

A relationship was observed however between the consumption of low energy drinks among five and seven year olds and fatness at age nine.

"There are three other possible explanations for the lack of association observed. First, children display better compensation for liquid calories than adults... Second, SSB consumption may be too low in this sample to have an impact on fatness... Third, high consumption of soft drinks may be a marker of an overall unhealthy dietary pattern, rather than a specific risk factor for fat gain," wrote the authors.

Global drinks consumption rose by 2.5 per cent during 2005, according to the globaldrinks.com, Zenith International's online database.

The total volume consumed was 1.47 trillion (trillion) litres, equivalent to 227 litres per person.

The rise in beverage sales was driven mainly by soft drinks, whose worldwide consumption increased by 3.9 per cent to 499 billion litres, equal to 77 litres per person.

But in the context of growing concern about obesity levels and greater public interest in health, it is interesting to note that the advance of soft drinks was led by better for you categories such as bottled water, fruit drinks and functional drinks.

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"Is sugar-sweetened beverage consumption associated with increased fatness in children?"

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