

How Much Sugar Is in Your Drink (and how it affects you)

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

Mike was just starting his new independent life, he was 20 years old, starting a new job and was hoping to go back to school. He was also 80 pounds overweight, barely able to walk up the stairs and was already beginning to show the early signs of diabetes. I met Mike when I had a part time dietitian gig at a nursing home he worked at. When Mike found out I was a dietitian he approached me asking for advice. He wanted to lose weight and to feel healthier. He told me he was really motivated to make a change. Mike was not into cooking, he liked meatball grinders, chips, French fries; he ate out almost every meal.

Mike told me he drank 2 liters of Coke every day. When I asked him if he could cut back on the soda, he said he could cut it out altogether. And just like that, he stopped drinking soda! He drank water instead. Before he made any other changes in his eating or exercise routines, he consistently lost 2 pounds per week, reported having much more energy and thinking much more clearly. The simple new habit of drinking water instead of soda was the beginning of a powerful journey for Mike. Mike's story might seem hard to believe because he made such a significant change with seeming ease, but I hear these types of stories all the time. I have met people who drink 3 liters of soda a day. I hear about people drinking liters of energy drinks, a combination of caffeine and sugar and this is even worse than eating just sugar. Many people have no idea that they are drinking beverages with much greater amounts of sugar than they realize.

Most people know that sugar is bad for them, but here is a one sentence review of the damage sugar can do: excess sugar can increase rates of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke, tooth decay, hypertension, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer, Alzheimer's and aging. Those are all chronic conditions but

consuming a lot of sugar can also make you feel tired, cranky, irritable, unfocused, fidgety, and hungry not long after you consume the sugar. You may feel more energetic and great right after you eat/drink sugar, but those feelings are temporary.

How much sugar is in your drink?

How do you find out how much sugar is in your drink? Well, all drinks should have a nutrition facts label somewhere on the bottle or carton. On the label, you will find sugars listed (in grams) under total carbohydrates. Of course, to most of us, the amount of grams of sugar in a product is not very telling, but you can easily convert grams to teaspoons. There are 4 grams of sugar in a teaspoon so all you have to do is look at the grams of sugar on the label and divide by 4. But don't stop there. Look on the label to see how many servings of sugar is in the bottle. If you are drinking the whole bottle you will need to multiply by the number of servings.

Here are some examples:

One 20 ounce can of Coca Cola contains 65 grams of sugar. $65 \div 4 = 16.25$. There is only 1 serving in a bottle, so in one 20 ounce can of Coca Cola there are 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons of sugar.

Another example:

In a 16-ounce Monster energy drink, the label says 27 grams of sugar, but there are 2 servings in this drink, so: $27 \div 4 = 6.75$ teaspoons. But you must then multiply this by 2 because there are 2 servings so, in reality there are 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons of sugar in a 16 ounce can of Monster energy drink.

To make this even more dramatic: If you were to drink a 20 ounce coke every day, you would be ingesting almost a pound of sugar per week.

Let's look at how much sugar is in some other popular drinks:

Starbucks – 24-ounce Caramel Frappuccino Blended Coffee – 21 teaspoon sugar

Dunkin Donuts – Large pumpkin swirl frozen Coffee with Milk – 46 teaspoons sugar

Darigold – 4 ounces eggnog – 4 teaspoons sugar

Mountain Dew Soda – 20 ounces – 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons sugar

Juicy Juice – 8 ounces – 7 teaspoons (natural sugar as compared to added sugar, but still very high)

Do some research! Check out how much sugar is in some of your favorite drinks by doing the math. *Grams of sugar divided by 4 multiplied by the number of servings.* You will likely be surprised by what you learn, and hopefully will be motivated to reduce how many of these unhealthy drinks you consume. This may truly help change your life!