



## Drink More Diet Soda, Gain More Weight?

### Overweight Risk Soars 41% with Each Daily Can of Diet Soft Drink

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June 13, 2005 -- People who drink DIET soft drinks don't lose weight. In fact, they gain weight, a new study shows.

The findings come from eight years of data collected by Sharon P. Fowler, MPH, and colleagues at the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio. Fowler reported the data at the annual meeting of the American Diabetes Association in San Diego. "What didn't surprise us was that total soft drink use was linked to overweight and obesity," Fowler tells WebMD. "What was surprising was when we looked at people only drinking diet soft drinks, their risk of obesity was even higher." In fact, when the researchers took a closer look at their data, they found that nearly all the obesity risk from soft drinks came from DIET sodas.

"There was a 41% increase in risk of being overweight for every can or bottle of DIET soft drink a person consumes each day," Fowler says.

Fowler's team looked at seven to eight years of data on 1,550 Mexican-American and non-Hispanic white Americans aged 25 to 64. Of the 622 study participants who were of normal weight at the beginning of the study, about a third became overweight or obese.

For regular soft-drink drinkers, the risk of becoming overweight or obese was:

- 26% for up to 1/2 can each day
- 30.4% for 1/2 to one can each day
- 32.8% for 1 to 2 cans each day
- 47.2% for more than 2 cans each day

For diet soft-drink drinkers, the risk of becoming overweight or obese was:

- 36.5% for up to 1/2 can each day
- 37.5% for 1/2 to one can each day
- 54.5% for 1 to 2 cans each day
- 57.1% for more than 2 cans each day

For each can of DIET soft drink consumed each day, a person's risk of obesity went up 41%.

There is actually a way that DIET drinks could contribute to weight gain, Fowler suggests.

When we offer our bodies the sweet taste of DIET drinks, but give them no calories. Fowler points to a recent study in which feeding artificial sweeteners to rat pups made them crave more calories than animals fed real sugar.

"If you offer your body something that tastes like a lot of calories, but it isn't there, your body is alerted to the possibility that there is something there and it will search for the calories promised but not delivered," Fowler says.

"People think they can just fool the body. But maybe the body isn't fooled," she says. "If you are not giving your body those calories you promised it, maybe your body will retaliate by wanting more calories. **Some soft drink studies do suggest that DIET drinks stimulate appetite.**