

## 15 Drinks That Are Almost As Bad As Soda

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We all know water is the number one drink to quench your thirst. But when you're in the mood for a little something more, you might order up a juice, cocoa, margarita, or iced tea. Problem is, those choices can be deceptively high in sugar and calories—and in some cases, you'd be better off drinking a soda. Sugary drinks make up almost half of all added sugar in the average American's diet, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest. That's why making smarter choices about these sips can pay off big time for your waistline and your health. Here are 15 places to start.

### **Fruit juice**

You'd think juice would be healthy—it's made from fruit, after all. Problem is, while fruit is rich in fiber, juice is not. So even if you opt for 100% fruit juice and avoid drinks with added sugar (like cranberry or grape cocktail), they're still high in the sweet stuff. For instance, a cup of grape juice contains 36 grams of sugar and a cup of apple has 31 grams—not far off from what you'll find in a can of lemon-lime soda, which racks up 44 grams.

**Make over your drink:** "I don't recommend juice ever, even 100% fruit juice," says Ilyse Schapiro, RD, author of *Should I Scoop Out My Bagel?* (\$11; amazon.com). "You'll feel much more full from eating the fruit, which has fiber, versus drinking the juice," she says.

## Hot cocoa

The sip is practically necessary on a chilly winter day (post-snowball fight, natch), but keep in mind that it's more of a dessert than an afternoon snack, says Chicago-based nutritionist Renee Clerkin, RD. A typical 16-ounce mug with whipped cream packs 400 calories and 43 grams of sugar—more than a can of cola.

**Make over your drink:** When you need a winter warm-up, Clerkin recommends DIYing a mix of non-Dutch processed cocoa and sugar. That way, you control the amount of sweetness. Start with one teaspoon of sugar and gradually increase the amount to taste. (One teaspoon contains 4 grams of sugar.) Adding spices like a dash of cinnamon or cayenne will add even more flavor, allowing you to use less sweet stuff.

## Sweetened iced tea

Tea is no doubt a good choice; it's full of disease-busting antioxidants. But syrupy-sweet iced teas contain a wallop of the white stuff, practically canceling out the health benefits. One popular brand has over 30 grams of added sugar in one bottle. Yep, that's more like dessert.

**Make over your drink:** Unsweetened iced tea is your best bet, whether you're getting a bottled or at a restaurant, since it contains zero added sugar. If plain is too bitter, Schapiro suggests adding 1 teaspoon (or one packet) yourself—it will still be less than a pre-mixed tea. Squeeze a lemon or orange on top for an additional flavor boost.

## Flavored coconut water

Part of the reason coconut water is so hot right now is because it's packed with electrolytes, like potassium; one 16-ounce container supplies more than 25% of the mineral you need in a day. "Electrolytes are minerals that help keep the body's fluid levels in balance so that the body is hydrated," says Clerkin. "You probably don't need to sip coconut water all day, but it can be helpful if you're sweating a lot during the summer or activity," she says. Read labels carefully, though. Flavored versions, like pineapple or mango, can pack more than 30 grams of sugar per 16-ounce container. Some have less because they use calorie-free sweeteners.

**Make over your drink:** Stick to plain coconut water, says Clerkin, which doesn't contain added sugar. "Drink it when you need to hydrate, not just casually throughout the day," she says. "Remember it still contains calories."

## Energy drinks

Even though they usually don't contain a ton of calories, an 8-ounce serving can run you more than 25 grams of sugar—and no, they aren't healthy just because they're fortified with B vitamins.

**Make over your drink:** Skip these entirely—and not just to save on sugar. Drinking just one Rockstar energy drink raised healthy people's blood pressure and norepinephrine (a stress hormone) levels more than a placebo drink, revealed a recent study in the journal JAMA. That may not be good for your heart. If you need a boost of caffeine, opt for a cup of coffee instead.

### **Sweetened yogurt drinks**

Probiotics is such a hot buzzword right now because, as research shows, the beneficial bacteria help keep your gut healthy. So you may be trying to get more in your diet. Enter probiotic yogurt drinks or kefir. They can be a healthy choice, but flavored versions rely on sugar to decrease yogurt's traditional tang. A small bottle may pack 26 grams of sugar, and contain multiple forms of the sweet stuff, including sugar, fructose, and fruit puree or juice.

**Make over your drink:** Plain versions are your best bet, since the only sugar they contain is from the milk itself. (A typical 1-cup serving of plain contains around 12 grams.) If that's not happening, consider skipping non-fat varieties and going for low-fat instead. In one popular brand, making that switch could save you nearly two teaspoons of sugar per serving.

### **Sweetened non-dairy milks**

Non-dairy milks like almond milk, cashew milk, and soymilk say they're better than cow's milk, but choose the wrong one and you'll end up with a sugar bomb for breakfast. "A glass of chocolate plant-based milk can have the same amount of sugar as a handful of cookies or a chocolate bar," says Shapiro.

**Make over your drink:** Read the ingredients and nutrition panel before you buy. That's because even deceptively innocent "plain" or "original" varieties may contain added sugar, says Schapiro. Look for unsweetened, unsweetened vanilla, or new reduced sugar flavors. And try the different types of plant milks—almond, cashew, rice—until you find one that you like the taste of when unsweetened, she says.

### **Tonic water**

You're probably sipping this as part of an alcoholic drink, not on its own. But if you're doing it because you think a "gin and tonic" is healthier than a "rum and coke," you're out of luck. Twelve ounces of tonic water adds 124 calories and 32 grams of sugar to your glass (that's 8 teaspoons). Compare that to a cola, which isn't too far off at 182 calories and 44 grams of sugar per 12 ounces. Whoops.

**Make over your drink:** When you're ordering up a booze beverage, ask for seltzer. Why? It's sugar- and calorie-free.

## Fancy coffee drinks

"Most people are blown away when they look at the calories and sugar in their lattes and Frappuccinos," says Schapiro. Case in point: a grande white chocolate mocha Frappuccino at Starbucks has 67 grams of sugar. Sure, some is from the milk, but most is from sugars that add up to nearly one-third of a cup of the sweet stuff. A vanilla latte is better, but still comes in at 35 grams of sugar for a medium size.

**Make over your drink:** Stick with coffee with milk, adding a packet of sugar yourself or sweetening it up with a shake or two of cinnamon or nutmeg at the barista bar. Want something fancier? Go for a café misto (coffee with steamed milk), recommends Schapiro.

## Sports drinks

Finish a bottle of one typical sports drink, and you'll have downed more than 50 grams of sugar. No surprise, considering sugar is listed as the second ingredient after water on the label. If you're training for a marathon, that makes sense; the sugar supplies carbs that help keep up your energy during the tough workout. Sitting at your desk all day? You don't need the extra sugar and calories.

**Make over your drink:** "Unless you are seriously training for a marathon or triathlon, you do not need to consume sports drinks," says Schapiro. Even if you regularly exercise three to five days a week, she recommends hydrating with water only.

## Margarita

Your favorite Cinco de Mayo sip is among the worst cocktail options. "A margarita made with a bottled mix can have more than 500 calories and more than 35 grams of sugar. That's the equivalent to the sugar in two and a half to three pieces of cake," says Clerkin. And you wouldn't wolf down three pieces of cake in one sitting, right?

**Make over your drink:** Not all cocktails are off limits. Your favorite booze plus soda water and a squeeze of lemon or lime is a great bet because it's almost sugar-free. "Pure alcohol, like vodka or tequila, does not have any carbs, protein, or fat," says Clerkin. A 1-ounce shot of tequila mixed with soda water and a squeeze of lime juice sets you back just 70 calories.

## Flavored "nutritional" waters

It's just like drinking sugar water—even if it does have vitamins added to the mix. Some bottles pack 30 grams of sugar (7 teaspoons) or more. "Even if they don't have added sugar, they have to be flavored somehow," Schapiro says. "This means they may contain artificial sweeteners or Stevia. And just because it uses a more natural calorie-free sweetener doesn't make it healthy." (For example, studies show the sweet taste can spur cravings for more sweet.)

**Make over your drink:** There's nothing wrong with not loving plain H<sub>2</sub>O. To spruce it up, add natural, sugar-free flavor by infusing water with lemons or fresh fruit. Do that either using a water pitcher with a built-in infuser (like the Prodyne Fruit Infusion Pitcher, \$20; [bedbathbeyond.com](http://bedbathbeyond.com)) or simply put cut up fruit in a water jug and enjoy.

## Lemonade

You know lemonade is sweet, of course. But it sounds like a better option than soda, right? It's got lemons! It's practically a fruit! Here's the kicker: you're probably drinking mostly sugar water. Consider a powdered lemonade drink mix; the first two ingredients are sugar and fructose (also sugar), plus artificial colors. Another lemonade brand uses high fructose corn syrup.

**Make over your drink:** Now's the time to make it at home to cut down on sugar. Try this recipe for rosemary lemonade (which contains just 10 grams of sugar per cup).

## Smoothies

Walk into any high-end gym and you'll see a smoothie bar. Safe to assume they're healthy, right? Not so much. Even though they're packed with fruit, you really can have too much of a good thing. "Fruit is healthy, but too much fruit adds up in calories and sugar, leading to blood sugar spikes and crashes," says Schapiro. One popular green bottled smoothie may advertise "no sugar added" but all of the juice and fruit purees add up to 53 grams of sugar per bottle. And, it's green, so you'd think it'd be a smart option.

**Make over your drink:** Schapiro prefers that you eat your fruit whole, but a smoothie can pack a lot of nutrition in a handy container you can run out the door with on busy mornings. Rather than buying a bottle at the store or hitting up a smoothie place, make it at home where you can control the ingredients.

## Beer

It's all about what—and how much—brewski you're knocking back. Drink a Bud Light Straw-Ber-Rita (beer + margarita) and you'll get 198 calories for a tiny 8 ounces, double the amount in the same amount of soda. Even if you're drinking traditional beers, they tend to contain more calories and carbs compared to wine and spirits, says Clerkin. The higher alcohol content of beer, the more calories, too. With rising alcohol content—especially in some craft brews (double IPAs, we're looking at you)—some contain 300-plus calories in one 12-ounce bottle.

**Make over your drink:** First order of business—make sure you stick to the recommended one alcoholic drink per day for women, and two for men. Now that that's out of the way, if you like beer, you can opt for light versions to save half the carbs and 50 calories per brew, says Clerkin. Other options: Guinness (126 calories) or Sierra Nevada Nooner Pilsner (161 calories) and Summerfest (158 calories). If you want something fruity, opt for a radler, a mix of beer and fruit

soda, which keeps alcohol content low. A Stiegl-Radler Grapefruit is 125 calories per 12-ounce bottle.