

Campaign stresses water over liquid sugar shockers

By Jim Steinberg, Staff Writer for the [San Bernardino Sun](#)
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Drink more water, preferably from the tap.

That's the message being delivered this summer by a variety of California public health and social service organizations.

In the Inland Empire, the Desert Sierra Health Network has launched its "Be Sugar Savvy" campaign, which includes the dissemination of details on the hidden amounts of sugar in foods and beverages that many think are healthy choices - or at least reasonably good choices.

This group, representing San Bernardino, Riverside and Inyo counties, is comprised of state, county and city government groups, school districts, private nonprofits and business organizations.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County has kicked off a campaign for a "Soda Free Summer," training county workers and others who assist low-income residents to get out the message that "fizzy and fun" can add weight and hurt calcium absorption, said Suzanne Bogert, a registered dietician with the Los Angeles County Health Department Nutrition Program.

Drinking a 20-ounce bottle of soda daily for a year can result in gaining as many as 25 extra pounds per year, Bogert said.

"With kids off for the summer, it's important to make the home soda-free," Bogert said.

Not only is weight gain an issue with soda, but there is a bone-density risk as well.

Generally, soda drinkers drink less milk. And teenage years are important for building bone density, she said.

Phosphoric acid, which is used in colas, has been shown in some studies to reduce the body's calcium absorption.

Sodas also increase the risk for cavities, Bogert said.

As part of the Desert Sierra Health Network's campaign, the group adopted a "Rethink Your Drink" campaign, said Jeanne Silberstein, project director for the Network for Healthy California - Desert Sierra Region and nutritionist in the San Bernardino County Public Health Department.

Whether the campaign is "Soda Free Summer" or "Rethink Your Drink," health professionals are urging consumers to substitute tap water for bottled water, sodas and other drinks.

The push for tap water is to save the consumer money and reduce the use of plastic bottles, Silberstein said. Water can be enhanced with lemon slices or the addition of other fruit.

Public health professionals warn that fruit juices can contain many calories. For example, 20 ounces of 100 percent apple juice contains 300 calories.

From the calorie perspective, it's better to eat whole fruit instead of drinking the juice, Silberstein and others say.

The "Be Sugar Savvy" campaign is designed to "increase consumer awareness of how many empty calories are hidden in foods deemed as healthy, such as yogurt, apple sauce and cereal bars," said Julie Manifold, a registered dietician and public health nutritionist with San Bernardino County.

Its purpose is to get consumers used to checking labels.

"There is no formula to identify how much sugar in a food is too much," Manifold said. "But the least amount of sugar you can consume is best to offset the risk of being overweight or obese and the chronic diseases associated such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and certain types of cancer.

According to "Be Sugar Savvy" information, Americans eat about 175 pounds of sugar per year, which is almost half a pound of sugar a day.

"It's no wonder that two out of three Americans are obese. They are eating 57 cubes of sugar per day," the materials say.

Think that's really hard to do?

Just have a Cinnabon cinnamon roll in the morning, a 20-ounce regular cola mid-morning, a 2.17-oz. bag of Tropical Skittles around lunch and a Rockstar Energy Drink in the afternoon, and you've got 58 teaspoons of sugar - more than half a pound, the materials say.

In Northern California, Banpac, the Bay Area Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative, continues its "Soda Free Summer" campaign for a second year, said Christina Goette, a senior program planner for the San Francisco County Department of Public Health.

Campaigns across the state are using materials developed and piloted by the Alameda County Public Health Department in 2007, Goette said.

"No sense reinventing the wheel," Silberstein said.

Funding permitting, next year the Desert Sierra group will likely focus on a "Soda Free Summer" campaign.

As part of the current general education push, the Desert Sierra members are highlighting "Sugar Shockers!," a list of some popular food items ranked by the amount of sugar.

Here's some items on the list:

McDonald's Triple Thick Chocolate Shake (medium), a 16-ounce treat with 580 calories and 21 teaspoons of sugar.

Wendy's Vanilla Frosty (medium), 16 ounces, 410 calories and 15 teaspoons of sugar.

Snappy Lemonade Iced Tea, 16 ounces, 220 calories, 14 teaspoons of sugar.

Original Gatorade, 20 ounces, 140 calories and nine teaspoons of sugar.

Red Bull Energy Drink, 8 ounces, 110 calories, seven teaspoons of sugar.

Burger King Honey Flavored Dipping Sauce, 1 ounce, 90 calories, six teaspoons of sugar.

Del Monte Ketchup, one tablespoon, 15 calories, one teaspoon of sugar.

Well before the "Be Sugar Savvy" campaign, Brenda Parker, a Rialto resident, became a champion mom, as part of the California Department of Public Health's Network for a Healthy California.

In that role, she developed a display of several common drinks and displayed the number of sugar packets next to each drink.

"Nine times out of 10, people are really surprised how much sugar is in each one," Parker said. "They tell me they had no idea there was so much sugar.

"A lot of times people say that they will not drink them anymore," she said.

Next school year, she plans to take her display to after-school programs at the Rialto Unified School District.