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## Soda In America: Taxes And A Debate Over Health



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- To Tax Or Not To Tax? States Enter The Soda Wars  
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For decades, Americans have been huge consumers of soda, but with much attention now on health and wellness, attitudes toward soda are shifting. On Tuesday and Wednesday, we're examining what's going on in the world of soft drinks. Today, NPR's Jeff Brady looks at efforts to tax soda. And Michele Norris gets two different views of the health effects of soda: from Gail Woodward-Lopez of the Center for Weight and Health; and from Maureen Storey, senior vice president for science policy at the American Beverage Association.

### Transcript

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ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

From NPR News, this is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. Im Robert Siegel.

MICHELE NORRIS, host:

And Im Michele Norris.

(Soundbite of a Coca-Cola ad)

Unidentified Group: (Singing) Oh, yeah. Always Coca-Cola...

NORRIS: Always Coca-Cola, the Pepsi Generation, Drink Dr. Pepper - for decades, Americans have had a love affair with soda. We drink it at home and restaurants, at ballgames and birthday parties, in board meetings, at the movies and yes, even in our cars. Last year, beverage companies produced more than 9 billion cases of carbonated soft drinks for the U.S. market. That's according to the publication "Beverage Digest."

(Soundbite of a Pepsi Cola ad)

Mr. MICHAEL JACKSON (Entertainer): (Singing) Join the Pepsi generation.

NORRIS: And though these jingles may forever be ingrained in our culture, sodas place in society is undoubtedly shifting. As health and wellness campaigns gain traction, soda consumption is on the decline, though it's still far above what it was a generation ago. Full-calorie soda is largely out of school buildings, thanks to a patchwork of state laws, and also to an agreement by the beverage industry to stock vending machines with lower calorie drinks.

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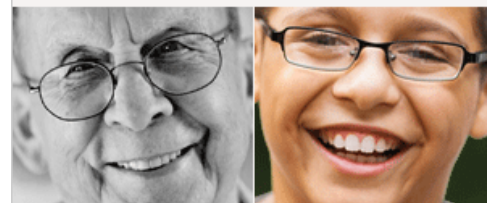
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Today and tomorrow, we're going to examine what's happening with soda in America. And we begin with you, the taxpayer. Across the country, there's talk of raising taxes on soda. Here in the District of Columbia, the idea is a penny an ounce tax to pay for the newly passed Healthy Schools Act. That legislation promises better food in schools, among other things.

Last year, the beverage industry defeated a national tax on soda after spending \$10 million on a nationwide ad campaign, a campaign that featured a mother unloading groceries from her car.

(Soundbite of an ad campaign)

Unidentified Woman: Washington is talking about a new tax on juice drinks and soda. They say it's only pennies. Well, those pennies add up when you're trying to feed a family.

NORRIS: Now, backers of the increased taxes on soda are finding some success at the state level, as NPR's Jeff Brady reports from Denver.

JEFF BRADY: Colorado recently joined more than 30 other states when it began subjecting soft drinks to its state sales tax. Before that, soda was exempt, like most groceries. The extra revenue will help fill a billion and a half dollar budget hole. For consumers, the new tax will add about five cents to the cost of a two-liter bottle of soda.

Kelly Brownell, at the Rudd Center on Food Policy and Obesity, says that's not enough. He wants new taxes that would boost the price of that same two-liter bottle by almost 70 cents. Brownell says a new tax has to be high if it's going to change America's habit of consuming about 50 gallons of sugar-added drinks a year.

Professor KELLY BROWNELL (Director, Rudd Center on Food Policy and Obesity, Yale University): We figure that a tax of a penny an ounce would reduce that number to 38.5 gallons per year.

BRADY: Brownell is one of the leading advocates for penalizing consumers who choose sugary drinks. He says the revenue could help pay for obesity-related health-care costs or even subsidize healthier foods.

Prof. BROWNELL: Well, you can educate people all day long, but that you can never compete with the amount of marketing money that the industry spends to educate people to consume these beverages.

BRADY: There are efforts to raise soda taxes in several states across the country, including California and New York. Activists like Brownell often point to cigarettes as their model. As taxes were increased and public perceptions of smoking changed, tobacco use declined significantly.

As you might expect, the \$110 billion a year soft drink business doesn't like being linked to tobacco. But in the same spirit as anti-smoking advertisements, New York City's Health Department has released a YouTube video showing orange soda that has big clumps of fat in it.

(Soundbite of video)

BRADY: The tagline says: Don't Drink Yourself Fat. The industry says it's being unfairly targeted here. Soft drink makers argue that even with increased soda consumption in this country, their products account for only 5 percent of the calories Americans consume.

Jeff Brady, NPR News, Denver.

NORRIS: So just how bad is soda for the body? We're going to hear two very different views, first from someone who does not drink soda. Gail Woodward-Lopez is associate director of the Center for Weight and Health at U.C. Berkeley. She says Americans are actually getting as much as 9 to 13 percent of our calories from soda and other sweetened beverages. And she says as Americans have consumed more sugary drinks, obesity rates have soared.

Ms. GAIL WOODWARD-LOPEZ (Associate Director, Center for Weight and Health, U.C. Berkeley): We have very strong evidence linking those two trends. And those two trends are so startlingly parallel. If you looked at a graph, the rise in sweetened beverage consumption would be in exact parallel with the increase in obesity rates.

We did a comprehensive literature review. We looked at hundreds of studies, and every type of evidence supports the link between sweetened beverage consumption, obesity, including correlations. In other words, people who drink more soda take in more calories and also are

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heavier. But we've also seen through intervention trials - that's where you either give soda to a group or have a group drink less soda - and we see that those who drink more soda gain weight, and those who drink less soda lose weight or maintain their weight.

NORRIS: Is it what's in soda, the ingredients, or is it the amount of soda that people are ingesting?

Ms. WOODWARD-LOPEZ: Really, it's a combination of the two. What we found is when people drink soda, they don't then reduce their intake of other foods and beverages. In other words, they don't compensate. So, for example, if you drink a soda or other sweetened beverage with your dinner, you don't eat less dinner because of that. Because it just doesn't have the same filling properties that other foods and beverages do.

Whereas, if you had a bowl of soup or if you had another snack item right before dinner, you might reduce your intake, with liquid calories it appears that you do not reduce your intake to the same degree.

NORRIS: How are the calories from sugar-sweetened beverages different within the body than the calories that you get from food?

Ms. WOODWARD-LOPEZ: Those calories are different, as I mentioned, in terms of the satiety - or how filling they are. They're also very different in terms of whether they come with any other nutrients. So what we find is that when you take in something like a highly processed substance, such as sugar or high-fructose corn syrup, every other nutrient has been stripped. So basically, you're just getting calories.

So these are added on to our intake of other foods that do provide those nutrients that our bodies need, or else they replace needed foods. Soda has dramatically replaced milk, in particular. Milk intake has plummeted dramatically, exactly at the time that soda and other sweetened beverage intake has increased.

NORRIS: Have there been studies done that link the rise in soda consumption to diabetes?

Ms. WOODWARD-LOPEZ: There have been links. I'm not sure specifically with soda but yes, relating to sugar intake. And of course, sweetened beverage consumption accounts for 50 percent of the sugar intake in the U.S. diet. So, it is the largest contributor to sugar intake, the largest single food contributor to calorie intake, and sugar intake has been linked to the increasing rates of diabetes.

NORRIS: Teenagers are often told to drink soda in moderation. So what does moderation mean?

Ms. WOODWARD-LOPEZ: I think I would say that our idea of moderation is very occasional use, which I think would be a maximum of once per week, if you want it on a special occasion, but definitely it should not be a part of your daily intake.

NORRIS: If we listen closely, I think we might have heard the sounds of heads snapping backward in amazement: One soda per week?

Ms. WOODWARD-LOPEZ: Yes. It just shows the cultural shift that we have made. I remember when I was a child, it was not considered appropriate to offer a soda with a meal on a regular basis, that milk or water was the norm. And that maybe if I was flying on an airplane or I was at a party, a soda might be offered. But I think we've seen this cultural shift, and we need to shift back to those basic principles that we know are right in terms of the intake, especially for children.

NORRIS: That's Gail Woodward-Lopez with the Center for Weight and Health at U.C. Berkeley.

Now for a rebuttal. We wanted to talk with Coke's CEO, Muhtar Kent. Last year, he wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal titled "Coke Didn't Make America Fat." But we were told Mr. Kent was unavailable. So instead, we turned to Maureen Storey. She's senior vice president for Science Policy at the American Beverage Association, and formerly a research professor at the University of Maryland.

When I asked her about soda and obesity, she pointed to a handful of studies that disproved the link between the two. She says what's going on in America is that people are consuming more of everything and not exercising enough. Soda, she says, is not to blame.

Dr. MAUREEN STOREY (Senior Vice President, Science Policy, American Beverage Association): Soda is comprised mostly of water. A full-calorie soft drink has 90 percent water, and a diet soft drink is 99 percent water. Water is the most important nutrient that we have...

NORRIS: Let's move down, though. If you're looking at that label on the back of a soda, what else is in there that is of nutritional value?

Dr. STOREY: Of nutritional value, there is either high-fructose corn syrup or sucrose, and that does provide energy or carbohydrates. And if we are active and need a refreshing beverage after a nice, long walk or a run, you can have a beverage and quench your thirst and stay hydrated.

NORRIS: Is it advisable after a nice, long run, or after going out and exercising - which you've been advocating - to reach for a beverage that has 22 grams of sugar or 34 grams of sugar? Is that nutritionally sound?

Ms. STOREY: Well, I don't think it's nutritionally unsound. There are some studies that show that particularly with children, children who have been exercising may not drink enough water to get back to the hydration point that they need to be at. So with a little bit of flavoring and a little bit of sweetness, they will drink enough, then, to get back to where they need to be.

NORRIS: As beverage manufacturers, do you feel like you're always on the defensive now? I mean, does your future look different because more people are paying more attention to these kinds of issues, including the people who happen to live at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue?

Ms. STOREY: I think that the soda companies are actually being very proactive. Obviously, our school beverage guidelines that have been implemented over the last three years were a very difficult thing to do.

The beverage companies also just agreed to the Clear on Calories Initiative, to put calories on the front of our packaging so that again, we are part of the solution to the obesity problem. And the proactivity I'm seeing in our industry is really unprecedented.

NORRIS: There are a lot of people who liken the beverage industry to the tobacco industry at that moment where Americans were paying much more attention to health concerns surrounding cigarettes. Is that an appropriate analogy?

Ms. STOREY: Absolutely not. Smoking kills people. There is no safe level of consumption. And soft drinks are an enjoyable, safe product that people have been enjoying for generations. There's just absolutely no comparison between those two.

NORRIS: Now, some in the medical community would say that soda contributes to certain health problems that do kill Americans in large numbers, or contribute to a very difficult lifestyle because of their medical problems: hypertension, obesity, diabetes.

Ms. STOREY: Again, it's a different universe, and someone who has developed type 2 diabetes, that has been caused by an inordinate amount of weight gain, and that weight gain didn't come just from soda pop. It came from eating too much of everything and not exercising enough to maintain a healthy weight.

I know that some people would like to compare our products with smoking, but it just is a totally inappropriate comparison done basically for hyperbole.

NORRIS: That's Maureen Storey of the American Beverage Association. Tomorrow, I will talk with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack about his soda habits.

Secretary TOM VILSACK (Department of Agriculture): At Lent, I gave up the diet sodas and while I've I now drink an occasional soda, I don't drink anywhere near as much as what I did before Lent, I'll tell you that, and before I got into this job.

NORRIS: That's in Part Two of our examination of soda in America.

(Soundbite of music)

NORRIS: It's ALL THINGS CONSIDERED from NPR News.

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Recent First



**Victor Reyes (Vagung)** wrote:

I think that Storey made few good points, but I agree with her that drinking soda is not nutritionally unsound. Soft drinks are not the problem. People drink soda in a lot of countries that don't have severe problems with obesity. Soda does not cause obesity, consuming more calories than you burn in a day is what causes obesity and if we as a nation could learn to start looking at what we eat, where it comes from, how many calories we burn, what is an adequate intake, and consider the entirety of our diet and lifestyle rather than just blaming one particular food, we'd be healthier. In high school we had a choice between a greasy pizza slice with Mcdonalds fries, a cheesy pretzel with Mcdonalds fries, or lettuce. Soda was not the problem. When it comes to food, it's like we are just too dumb for our own good.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 10:32:32 PM

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**Howard Kwong (AiYahh)** wrote:

I used to drink soda all the time, at every meal. I finally got off the sugary stuff by switching to water, flavored prepared teas and fruit juice, and now, I brew my own tea without any carbonation or added sugar. As a result, my weight has gone down drastically and I have been able to maintain it.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 8:25:22 PM

[Recommend \(0\)](#) ↑

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**Geoff Richards (GR3)** wrote:

Soda pop is definitely bad and nasty. I got hooked as a teen and haven't been able to ditch the stuff fully yet. I'm transitioning to carbonated water, like LaCroix or no-name grocery brands like this. It's helped to cut way down, but not to the one per week amount recommended in the story. Still, taxing this stuff. Yikes, seems way too socialist. Those same people are all for Tax this, tax that. Where will that get us? To a bloated, entitlement sector, like Greece. So, let's find a better way to deal with this. I personally helped throw this out of a large public school district that had become hooked on the pennies this junk generated in in-school sales. That was a good start. Now, let's get those Mongo-sized drinks out of the Quick

Trips, AM/PM's and Seven Elevens. Then, get the fast food place to disallow free re-fills.  
Seems a better path than taxing it...

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 8:15:27 PM

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**heather mccullough (heather2010)** wrote:

Maureen Storey is worst than a terrorist! Obesity is killing our nation's people FAR more than any bombs -- not to mention childhood diabetes is at EPIDEMIC proportions!! With her false and misleading information, I honestly don't know how can she sleep at night!? Soda is 90% water??? How ridiculous?? It's a liquid, yes, but it's also approximately 40 grams of sugar -- WHICH TURNS INTO FAT!!! Then the part about carbohydrates??? COMPLEX carbs are what benefit the body -- NOT SIMPLE carbs, which are basically converted to FAT. The proof that soda is evil is in our sad stereotype as the FAT AMERICANS! Did anyone see the Jamie Oliver show with the double-wide coffins? That is our reality and it's a travesty!! SODA IS A BIG COMPONENT OF OUR OBESITY EPIDEMIC. Peg, I am truly sorry about your daughter but soda is not the answer to her health problems.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 6:55:14 PM

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**Peg Rivard (Pegriv)** wrote:

PLS READ:My Daughter Gabriella has Cystic Fibrosis and is 20 months old.

I fully support the cigarette tax, as I see them unhealthy in virtually every way, and cant think of anyone being negatively effected (health wise) by this cigarette tax. I do not agree with the sugary food tax. You need to understand that this will affect those struggling to maintain and gain weight vital to just being alive, like my daughter. Gaining weight is vital to her staying alive and vital to her lung function. She struggles with it everyday as part of her disease. My husband and I don't give our daughter soda at 20 months old, but we do purchase several cases of very high calorie shakes and supplements such as Breeze, in order for her to maintain and gain weight. The calories in the Nestle carnation instant breakfast that we buy is calculated at 560/per can. We have to order these by mail order, as we can't get them locally. We add ice cream and heavy cream and sour cream to her food. Calories are key. We are lucky that we have the means to even provide this way for her. Many parents of CF children do not. Gabbie is currently at the 10th percentile for her weight. It is a constant struggle and extremely costly, as it is. Dont support this.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 1:51:42 PM

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**Penny Osborne (penny)** wrote:

Make adding high fructose corn syrup to ANY food illegal. Then, Coke and Pepsi et al have to use real SUGAR. Real sugar costs more. They will either use less or raise the price.

Problem solved.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 10:47:58 AM

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**Mary Newsome (m801)** wrote:

I noticed that the fact that caffeine is a diuretic didn't come up when Story suggested that soda can be used to rehydrate after exercise.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 9:19:52 AM

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**Barbara Scott (FinalEyes)** wrote:

One problem I can see is that soda is usually drunk in combination with VERY fattening foods: cheeseburgers, pizza, etc. Soda just doesn't taste that good with a salad.

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 8:58:16 AM

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**david jenson (Yahoo4ever)** wrote:

Sure, but the taxes collected are used where?..slush fund?...

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 7:16:34 AM

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**Ann Thompson (Ann\_ie)** wrote:



What about the effect of soda pop on the bones? I understand women, particularly, should limit soda pop to 1 can a day at a maximum, but preferably 1 can per week. I am led to believe it interferes with bone density.

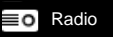
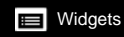
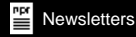
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