

Despite 'pop'ularity, students need soda alternatives

BY ERIN ANDERSON
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Turn on the television set or flip through the pages of almost any magazine, and you'll find no shortage of advertisements promoting the flavorful, thirst-quenching powers of pop. While soda may be your beverage of choice, you might want to think twice before making it your child's routine drink.

A 2003 study found that 56 percent of 8-year-olds in the United States consume soft drinks every day, and nearly one-third of teenage boys drink at least three cans in 24 hours. According to the USDA, adolescents ages 12 to 17 obtain nearly 11 percent of their daily calories from soft drinks alone.

And just what's in each can of that bubbly beverage? The main ingredients in nearly all sodas are sugar (the average 12 oz. can contains roughly 10 teaspoons), corn syrup, caffeine and water as well as artificial coloring.

These substances are often blamed for a variety of health problems including obesity, tooth decay, caffeine dependence and bone weakening as health professionals and research organizations would agree.

The problem, said Munson Registered Dietitian Connie Metcalf, is that when kids are drinking soda, they're not drinking the more healthful alternatives that can provide essential nutrients.

"Sodas displace more nutritious drinks like water, milk and 100 percent

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Dentist Charles Kehr, on drinking soda pop

fruit juices," she said. Metcalf recommends low- or non-fat milk for its protein and its bone-building calcium. Soda contain neither, plus recent studies claim that the phosphorus commonly found in sodas can actually deplete bones of calcium, leaving them more porous and prone to fracture.

While anyone should make sure their calcium intake is sufficient and their phosphoric intake minimized, this is especially important for those in their peak bone-building years. Nearly half a person's bone mass is formed during his/her teen years. Low or non-fat milk is also low in calories, Metcalf reminds her patients: much lower in calories than sodas, which are primarily sugar and, therefore, extremely high-calorie.

Can't beat the smile on your kids' faces when they snap the top on a pop? Consider what that smile might look like a few years from now due to the effects soda can have on their teeth.

Dentist Charles Kehr sees these effects all too often in

his Beulah practice. "Sodas are a big problem," he said. "Not only are they high in sugar, which encourages decay, they're also extremely acidic."

Kehr explained that the mouth's natural bacteria converts the sugar to acid, which attacks teeth and weakens enamel: a process called demineralization.

Once the enamel is weakened, teeth are vulnerable to the bacteria in the mouth. This acid attack is made even more damaging by the fact that most people don't swiftly down their soda in the manner they would a glass of water. Most people nurse their pop, sipping for an hour or more, or drinking several throughout the day, prolonging the acid application.

"It's like a constant acid bath for your teeth," said Kehr. "Your saliva doesn't have the chance it normally would to neutralize the acid in your mouth."

With all the strikes against sugar-packed pop, think the answer is drinking diet? Think again. Even diet soda has its drawbacks.

"Even though an occasional diet soda is better than

drinking a lot of regular pop, it's still an empty drink taking the place of something more nutritious," said Metcalf. "Also, the caffeine in diet soda can still interrupt a child's sleep, and wind them up during the day to the point where they have trouble focusing in school."

Kehr agrees that diet soda isn't the solution. Diet soft drinks still contain their own abundance of acid, whether or not they contain sugar. Diet sodas are also typically even higher in caffeine than their sugar-laden counterparts.

As far as soft drink alternatives are concerned, Heidi Keckemethy, a nationally acclaimed, Delaware-based pediatric research dietitian echoes Metcalf's promotion of milk.

"It doesn't matter if it's white or chocolate milk," she said. "When a child drinks milk at lunch, they are getting the proper nutrition."

Of course, chocolate milk will have more sugar, so that should be considered, as well as offering low-fat or skim milk which will provide the same nutritional benefits with less fat and fewer calories.

If you decide to pack juice, chose 100 percent juice, rather than juice "drinks" or "punches" whose primary ingredient is high-fructose corn syrup. These beverages are composed almost entirely of sugar and are, therefore, extremely high-calorie. Of course, choosing a can of cola or packing the snappy sweetness of a carbonated

fruit drink often seems like the natural choice.

With clothes to wash, supplies to gather, and homework to look over, by the time most parents get around to choosing their child's after-school snack or packing their lunch, they're often concerned that it contain two main ingredients: uncomplicated and inexpensive. As understandable as this is, often times the price of these convenient choices on their child's health is more than they're willing to pay.

All this being true, are the facts any match for your child's unhappiness over the prohibition of pop? Metcalf acknowledges that weaning children, or anyone, entirely off soda would be difficult, and even unnecessary.

"We never want to make any one food or beverage completely off limits," she said.

But cutting down on cola consumption can be particularly difficult when kids are tempted by soft drinks even at school.

In fact, according to the National Soft Drink Association, soft drinks are now sold in 60 percent of all public and private middle schools and high schools nationwide. Although, according to Michigan law, schools are required to unplug these machines during meal-time hours, in actuality, few machines actually cease operation during these peak soft drink times.

In fact, in some areas of the country, feelings of outrage over this blatant pro-

motion of pop have grown so strong that soda is being banned from schools altogether.

In 2003, the Los Angeles school board voted to phase out sodas and other sugar-loaded drinks from its vending machines. New York City school officials recently did the same when they passed a measure to eliminate soft drinks, hard candy and doughnuts from their machines.

Excessive soda consumption is typically fostered by introduction of the drinks at a young age. The younger the child, the more likely soda drinking will become habit, and the amount they ingest will usually increase over time.

Metcalf noted that it is not uncommon to see very young children, even those who are barely yet toddlers, sipping on soda. A recent study conducted by the Michigan Dental Association found that one fifth of all one- and two-year-old children regularly drink soda pop.

She suggested that parents help combat the soda industry's marketing, which is overwhelmingly targeted toward children and teens, by minimizing soft drinks available at home or packed in school lunches, and stocking up on tasty, but healthful, alternatives.

"I encourage parents to be role models by making healthy choices themselves," said Metcalf.

Erin Anderson is a local freelance writer.

Make it a habit: Key to studying is learning to stay organized

BY MARK EDWARD NERO
Copley News Service

No matter what educational level you're at, from elementary school to post-graduate learning, the study habits you employ can be key to how successful you are in your course work.

Good study habits go a long way toward having a successful academic career. And bad study habits? Well, in some cases, bad study habits can sometimes usher you right out of school altogether.

But what constitutes "good" study habits? And what are some of the things that students should do to get the most out of their study time?

According to many education professionals, settling on a good place to study is the beginning. A "good place" basically means a desk with nothing on it

except what you need for the task you are going to work on. So move everything out of the way, because after all, your aim is to concentrate on just one thing: studying.

Additionally, make sure you have everything you need nearby. This includes your assignment notebook, all required text and reference books, a solid flat surface for writing, good lighting, a comfortable chair, books, supplies, eyeglasses, if needed and a clock to help you manage your time.

According to www.howtostudy.com, supplies such as pencils, pens, markers, erasers, Liquid Paper, ruler, stapler and staples, paper clips, pencil sharpener, Post It notes, index cards, paper, scissors, calculator, etc., are good to have within arm's reach. The site recommends keeping them all in one container, such as a shoe box.

Good students also try to eliminate all distractions. Ones to avoid include television, loud music and telephones. A computer, while a useful tool during study time, can also serve as a distraction if you allow yourself to play games on it or surf the Internet.

Classical or other instrumental music played softly may be helpful, but songs with lyrics can sometimes prove distracting.

Also try to be aware of when you start to daydream and try to stop right away. Studying during the daytime is recommended, since you're less likely to fall asleep when the sun's shining.

Good health is important, say the experts: you should eat three good meals a day; your body needs energy to study well. And out of every hour you study, you should take a 10- to 15-minute break to stretch

and clear your mind.

Important component to studying well are keeping organized and taking legible notes in class. Some teachers require that students maintain an organized notebook in their classes.

Whether you use a loose-leaf notebook, a spiral-bound notebook or a combination of both, it should be clean and orderly. Each entry should be dated. Subject notes should be kept separate from other subjects and dividers should be clearly labeled.

For example, don't take notes on a history assignment in the trigonometry section of your notebook.

You should try to remember to keep a section of your notebook free to use when you only need paper for homework. And try to avoid the urge to doodle in your notebook; remember, the notebook's purpose is

to help you keep track of and remember the material for each day's classes, and to organize the material later to prepare for tests and quizzes.

Finally, have a regular time and place for studying. Getting into the habit of buckling down at a desk or table at a certain time is good, plus it shows discipline and commitment.

"Before you even begin to think about the process of studying, you must develop a schedule," says Robert Kizlik, author of the book "Writing Learning Objectives." "If you don't have a schedule or plan for studying, then you will not have any way of allocating your valuable time when the unexpected comes up.

"A good, well-thought-out schedule can be a lifesaver," he said. "It's up to you to learn how to develop a schedule that meets your needs, revise it if necessary and, most important, follow it."

Kizlik says it's important to remember your schedule isn't written in stone. Don't be afraid to rework it if necessary.

"Schedules are really plans for how you intend to use your time. If your schedule doesn't work, revise it," he said. "You must understand that your schedule is to help you develop good study habits. Once you have developed them, schedule building becomes easier."

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