

Why Swimmers Should Stay Away From Soft Drinks

By Bill McKeon



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Swimmers work hard to get their bodies fine-tuned and firing on all cylinders. Unfortunately, attempts to reach the heights of fitness can be foiled in unsuspected ways. Many swimmers are unaware of the various ways in which carbonated soft drinks can disrupt the proper functioning of the human body. In fact, the negative effects linked to soft drink consumption could undermine a swimmer's entire season of training.

THE DEHYDRATION FACTOR

The first problem with soft drinks is that swimmers sometimes drink them in place of what they really need, which is water. Fluids lost while training should be replaced quickly, but trying to rehydrate with soft drinks just doesn't work. The high sugar levels found in soft drinks increase the body's need for water. If the drinks are caffeinated, the dehydration process is accelerated. The end result can be degraded performance in practice and competition, not to mention generally degraded health.

THE DANGER POSED BY PHOSPHORIC ACID

Phosphoric acid is added to many soft drinks to keep the carbonated bubbles from going flat. Researchers believe that the human body responds to this influx of phosphorus by releasing calcium from the bones and teeth to rebalance the body's critical phosphorus/calcium ratio. Some studies suggest that phosphoric acid is responsible for the loss of bone density in those who regularly consume soft drinks. With this in mind, swimmers who value strong bones should try to resist the lure of these destructive, bubbling drinks.

THE PROBLEM WITH HIGH-FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP

High-fructose corn syrup is a man-made sweetener. It is cheaper and sweeter than sugar, so it is used almost exclusively to sweeten non-diet soft drinks (and many other food products). The problem is that the human body is not equipped to handle this alien substance.

When the body is forced to try to metabolize high-fructose corn syrup, unhealthy reactions are triggered. For instance, studies show that animals on high-fructose diets

develop liver problems that are similar to the liver problems found in alcoholics. This is probably because the liver is overburdened by the unnaturally high volume of fructose it is asked to process.

Many researchers blame the soaring obesity rate in the U.S and other countries on the consumption of high-fructose corn syrup. This Frankenstein-like substance dodges the body's normal mechanisms for controlling appetite, allowing people to drink one soft drink after another without ever feeling full. The fructose is converted to fat, and, over time, bodyweight skyrockets.

There is virtually no upside to consuming soft drinks sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup, but there are plenty of negatives. Swimmers looking to maintain their health and fitness should make every effort to stay away from these menacing drinks.

THE PERILS OF ASPARTAME

Aspartame is an artificial sweetener used to sweeten most diet drinks. It is also known as NutraSweet, Equal, Spoonful, and Equal-measure. It would be nice if aspartame was a healthy alternative to high-fructose corn syrup. It is not. In the words of William Campbell Douglass II, M.D., the author of five books and editor of *The Douglass Report*:

"Aspartame is one of the most dangerous substances ever added to food."

According to Dr. Joseph Mercola, author of the book, *Take Control of Your Health*, "Aspartame accounts for over 75 percent of the adverse reactions to food additives reported to the

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FDA. Many of these reactions are very serious including seizures and death. A few of the 90 different documented symptoms listed in the report as being caused by aspartame include: Headaches/migraines, dizziness, seizures, nausea, numbness, muscle spasms, weight gain, rashes, depression, fatigue, irritability, tachycardia, insomnia, vision problems, hearing loss, heart palpitations, breathing difficulties, anxiety attacks, slurred speech, loss of taste, tinnitus, vertigo, memory loss, and joint pain."

Swimmers who care about their long-term health should stay at least a pool's length away from diet soft drinks.

THE CASE AGAINST CARBONATION

To produce carbonated beverages, carbon dioxide, under

high pressure, is pumped into water. Since the human body works hard to expel carbon dioxide as a byproduct of respiration, it makes no sense to purposely ingest this gas.

In terms of nutrition, carbonation is known to interfere with digestive enzymes. This can lead to the malabsorption of minerals and other vital nutrients. Swimmers cannot recover from workouts if these nutrients are not available. Some scientists have implicated carbonation as being responsible for suppressing the immune system. This could leave swimmers vulnerable to every viral and bacterial threat they encounter.

THE FINAL WORD

Considering the peril, the Food and Drug Administration should step up and mandate that a health warning be printed on all soft drink cans and bottles. The Center for Science in the Public Interest has suggested warnings, such as: "Drinking too much non-diet soda may contribute to weight gain" and "A 12-ounce serving of this drink contains 40 milligrams of caffeine, a mildly addictive stimulant drug. Not appropriate for children." But looking back at history, we see that tobacco products were sold for many years before a health warning was required. So for now, swimmers would be wise to act as if the health warning was already there.

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