

WELLBEING

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I'll Drink To That: Why Less May Be More When It Comes To Beverages

Americans are a thirsty people. We consume a lot of beverages. Some have nutrients, some promise to restore and revive, and many supply significant calories.

And that's what has medical professionals, dietitians and researchers concerned. About 21% of our daily calories are coming from what we drink. That number was about 14% in the late 70s.

Is our beverage habit – including daily doses of carbonated soft drinks, juice drinks, smoothies and coffee creations – making us fat? Some argue that is it is, in part because we don't compensate for high-calorie beverages by eating less. And diet drinks may not be the answer because drinks with artificial sweeteners may condition us to crave sugars.

In 2006, a group of university nutrition and health scholars – the Beverage Guidance Panel – published their recommended system for beverage consumption ... a kind of liquid equivalent of the food guide pyramid.

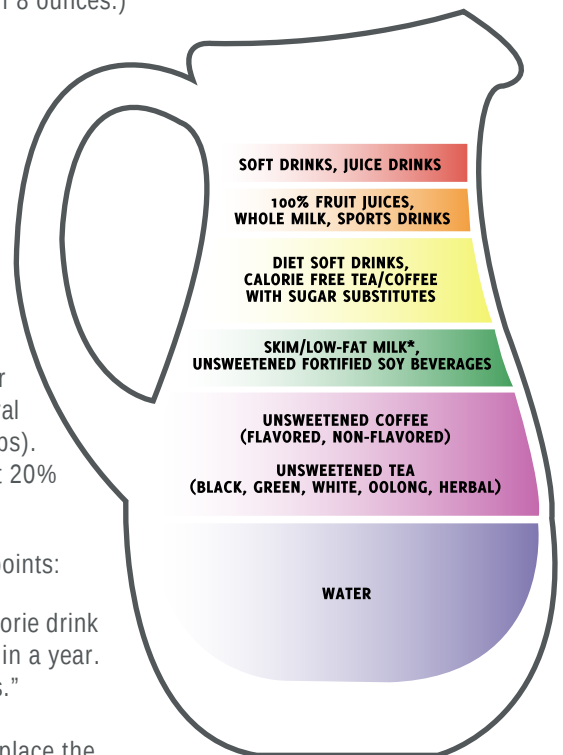
The goal would be to obtain 10% or less of your daily calories from what we are drinking. To achieve that, here are general guides:

- Water = at least 50% of your daily fluid requirement.
- Unsweetened coffee or tea = 1/3 of your daily liquid requirement. Or you can stick with water.
- Low-fat milk = 20 percent. Less is fine, but make sure you get the nutrients milk supplies from another source.
- 100% fruit juice = limit of 4 ounces or 1 alcoholic drink for women and up to 2 for men
- Ideally, zero "diet" drinks with artificial sweeteners. Realistically, that could be up to 1 to 2 glasses (8 to 16 ounces) a day.
- Ideally, zero drinks sweetened with sugar or high-fructose corn syrup (maximum 8 ounces.)

Here is what that might look like for a person who consumes 2,200 calories a day:

- six 8-oz servings of water
- three-to-four 8 oz servings plain tea or coffee
- one to 2 cups of milk
- 4 oz fruit juice/ 1 alcoholic beverage - women; up to 2 for men
- zero diet drinks – maximum 8 to 16 oz.
- zero sugar-sweetened drinks – maximum 8 oz.

You can select beverages from the different levels - just be sure to watch calories and caffeine. If you are consuming 2,000 calories per day, you can consume 200-300 calories from beverages each day.



Of course, the amount of fluids needed varies based on how much you eat, the weather and your level of activity. The Institute of Medicine has set an adequate intake or general guide of 125 ounces (about 15 cups) for men and 91 ounces for women (about 11 cups). Most people get about 80% of their daily fluid requirements from beverages, and about 20% from food.

The Harvard School of Public Health sums up its own Rx for healthier drinking in five points:

1. Cut out or cut down sugar-sweetened soda or fruit drinks. If you drink one 150-calorie drink per day without cutting calories elsewhere in your diet, you can gain 15 pounds in a year.
2. Cut out "diet" drinks, which "may condition taste buds to crave super-sweet foods."
3. If you don't drink alcohol, don't start.
4. If you're more couch potato than athlete, you don't need sports drinks. They replace the carbs, electrolytes, and fluids you can lose during high-intensity workouts of an hour or more.
5. "No one needs" energy drinks. These are generally high in sugar and contain enough caffeine to raise blood pressure; long-term effects of other herbs and additives in energy drinks are not known.

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