

# How is Sugar Linked to Cancer? Or Is It?



By Ruth Kava — October 5, 2016



sugar-sweetened beverage [1]

Our consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages has been linked to virtually every illness known to man (only a slight exaggeration) — including obesity and type 2 diabetes — to name just a couple. Thus far it hasn't been blamed for most cancers — but that doesn't mean that people aren't trying to do just that. An example is a recent [report](#) [2] in the journal *Translational Cancer Research*, citing data suggesting that there might be a link between recurrence of some cancers and high sugar consumption, they attempted to determine if cancer survivors had high intakes of sugar from sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs).

The senior author of the report was Dr. Melinda Sothorn from LSU Health New Orleans. She and colleagues analyzed data from NHANES surveys between 2003 and 2012, focusing on the SSB intake by cancer survivors and that of individuals without cancer. In particular, they wanted to ascertain if there was a difference in high intakes of SSB leading to a sugar intake of 80 grams or more (about 20 teaspoons) per day. They included soda, fruit drinks, punches, sports drinks, tea and other beverages that contain added caloric sweeteners. Of the more than 22,000 adults included in the study, about 20,000 had not had cancer, while about 2100 had survived some form of the disease. Of these folks, 3300 of the non-cancer people were high sugar consumers, as were about 167 of the cancer survivors. Those in the remainders of each group were considered to be low sugar consumers (less than 80 grams per day).

Analysis of the data showed that about 17 percent of the non-cancer survivors were high consumers, compared to about 8 percent of the survivors. But several demographic factors might account for this statistically insignificant difference. For example, the non-cancer individuals who consumed high sugar tended to be younger, male and black. They also were more likely to be obese, current smokers, and more of them had only high school educations.

The investigators found that age was the chief factor associated with high intake of sugar-sweetened SSBs which decreased more with age in cancer survivors than in patients without cancer. And the authors noted, "The lower overall rate of sugar intake from SSBs in cancer survivors compared to non-cancer individuals was primarily due to the majority of cancer survivors being elderly." This finding is no surprise, since, on the whole, cancer tends to be a disease of older people.

However, one factor the authors couldn't consider and might be important is that cancer survivors might also have made greater efforts to consume "healthy" diets, and thus might consciously have decreased their consumption of SSBs. Whether or not that was the case, these data do not support the hypothesis that SSB consumption could be causally linked to any recurrence of a variety of cancer types.

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