

# Soda companies adapt to consumer preferences

*By ACSH Staff — May 16, 2012*

Sodas have been taking a big hit in the war on obesity lately. Perhaps, then, it's not too surprising that average soda consumption by Americans is on a [slow downward trend](#) [1]: As of last year, the average American drank slightly less than two sodas per day a 16 percent decrease from the peak of soda consumption in 1998. Now, beverage manufacturers are looking for ways to keep profits high as soda becomes the poster child for those who seek an easy target in the struggle against obesity.

A variety of initiatives attacking soft drinks in an effort to lower obesity rates have come into play in recent years. For instance, many schools have stopped selling such beverages in vending machines, and some have even banned sodas altogether. But it's worth considering what school children without recourse to soda might be drinking to replace it. Sports drinks and fruit juices, for example, generally have just as many or more calories than the displaced sodas. All that these initiatives do, says ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, is encourage kids to replace soda with calorie-laden fruit juices; that won't make any difference in childhood obesity. The reason the anti-soda fanatics rarely mention one obvious alternative diet sodas is that their real agenda is anti-Big Soda and has little to do with fighting obesity.

Perhaps due partially to these initiatives, Americans are indeed drinking less soda, leaving manufacturers to cope by diversifying their offerings. Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Co, and Dr. Pepper all have been increasing their focus on non-carbonated beverages, such as iced tea, juice, and bottled water. And as consumers look for smaller portions to reduce their calorie consumption, soda manufacturers have been offering a wider variety of package sizes. Sales of Coca-Cola's new 7.5-ounce mini cans, for example, are on fire, according to Sandy Douglas, the president of Coca-Cola North America. These companies are also looking for ways to lower the calorie-count by using a blend of different sweeteners, resulting in products that have fewer calories than a full-sugar soda yet are still more caloric than diet soda.

But ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross disagrees with the premise that soda consumption is responsible for the nation's current obesity epidemic. Rates of soda consumption were steady during the years that obesity prevalence rose, and now soda consumption is down while obesity remains unchanged, he notes. So how can soda consumption be responsible for rising obesity rates? Those who target sugar and soda are seeking simple solutions for complex problems, with an underlying anti-business agenda.

And while we're on the topic of sugary drinks: A candidate for the silliest research article of the week has just been released from a group at the University of California, Los Angeles. The study claims that eating sugar especially the fructose in high-fructose corn syrup for long periods of time can [impair memory and learning](#) [2]. But is this what the study actually found? As is so often the

case with medical headlines no. What the researchers really discovered is that if rats are fed omega-3 fatty acids along with large amounts of fructose for six weeks, they remember a maze better than rats fed only large amounts of fructose over the same time period.

What does this study really mean for us humans, though? Absolutely nothing, says Dr. Ross. Rats are not little people, and both the publicity-seeking scientist and whoever wrote the headline that neglects the significant fact that this is a rat study should have their journalism credentials yanked.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom adds, I continue to be astonished at the number of times that a headline not only fails to represent the actual story, but actually contradicts it. It's no wonder that Americans are so confused about medical and science issues. The press is doing us all a disservice with sloppy and inaccurate headlines.

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[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/16/business/pepsi-and-competitors-scramble-as-soda-sales-drop.html>

[2] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2145141/Does-sugar-make-stupid-Study-suggests-sabotages-learning-memory.html>