

Tips for Talking With Patients About Sweetened Beverages

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Regular intake of sugary drinks is associated with increased risk of weight gain, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, other chronic diseases, and premature death.¹

As part of weight loss or glycemic control efforts, patients may seek alternatives to sugar-sweetened beverages, which may include beverages with artificial sweeteners. Some studies support the use of artificially sweetened beverages in reducing the risk of metabolic syndrome² and in weight management.³ However, other research points to lack of benefit for weight management^{4,5} and an alteration of the gut microbiome.⁶ For the sweetener erythritol specifically, a higher risk of cardiovascular disease has been shown in observational studies.⁷

When discussing patient goals, clinicians can validate that changing any habit can be difficult but ultimately rewarding. In addition to offering a supportive environment in which to discuss behavior change, clinicians can offer a list of healthier alternative options to sugar-sweetened or artificially sweetened beverages.

Table 1. Sugary Beverages: Definitions and Alternatives

Drink Type	Definition	Examples
 <p>Sugar-Sweetened Beverages</p>	Sweetened with added sugar or other sweeteners, such as high fructose corn syrup or fruit juice. ¹	Soda, fruit drinks, energy drinks, sugar-sweetened water, coffee and tea beverages, and sugar-sweetened alcoholic beverages ¹
 <p>Artificially Sweetened Beverages</p>	Contain non-nutritive sweeteners, such as aspartame, saccharin, sucralose; low-calorie sweeteners such as monk fruit extract or steviol glycosides; or sugar alcohols, such as sorbitol or erythritol. ³	
 <p>Healthy Alternatives</p>	Do not contain added sugar or non-nutritive sweeteners.	Water, flavored carbonated water, water flavored with fresh herbs, a splash of juice, or citrus

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