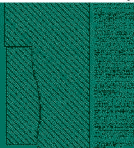


ROCHESTER

# Democrat and Chronicle

Date: Wednesday, January 06, 2016  
 Location: ROCHESTER, NY  
 Circulation (DMA): 90,786 (78)  
 Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)  
 Page: 3C,6C  
 Section: Living  
 Keyword: Jacob E. Teitelbaum



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## PREVENTION MAGAZINE

**S**ure, diet soda isn't the sugar and calorie bomb of regular soda, but it's not exactly harmless either. "Not only is there little evidence that diet drinks help people lose or maintain weight," says Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition at New York University and author of *Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (and Winning)*, "but there's some evidence that diet drinks cause similar metabolic problems to sugary drinks."

Indeed, a University of Minnesota study of nearly 10,000 adults found that just one diet soda a day triggered a 34 percent higher risk of metabolic syndrome, that cluster of symptoms that includes belly fat and high cholesterol and can lead to heart disease.

"Anything with a heavy sweet taste, even if it's not technically sugar, may stimulate insulin release," explains Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, author of *The Complete Guide to Beating Sugar Addiction*. "When it becomes excessive, you start to see a rise in insulin resistance, diabetes and heart disease." Part of the reason it becomes excessive is that your taste buds get used to sweetness and then require more and more to feel satisfied.

The artificially sweetened, caramel-colored bubbly has also been shown to cause tooth decay, thinning bones and kidney decline, and to increase the odds of obesity.

To curb your cola consumption, you could try weaning yourself slowly: First, cut out one can a day for two weeks; then, mix the remaining one with water; then, go down to

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half a can. But Teitelbaum believes there's a better way. "The issue is that it's an addiction — there's something driving the craving," he says. "If you don't address what's driving the craving, it won't go away."

Here's how you might be using diet soda to achieve various goals — and

the healthier way to meet those needs. "Whatever way you choose to do it, have a plan," advises Londa Sandon, assistant professor of clinical nutrition at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. "Have other drinks on hand to replace your soda with."

**You need energy.**

If you pop a can of diet soda when you're looking for a pick-me-up, it could be the caffeine you're after.

**Your diet soda detox:** Try coffee or tea, which are chock-full of antioxidants for a good measure of disease protection. It's OK to lightly sweeten them — as long as you choose stevia, a naturally sweet plant extract, or a teaspoon of honey, and not three packets of table sugar or the artificial stuff. Sandon recommends fruit-flavored iced tea such as cold brew peach or berry by Celestial Seasonings, because the fruit provides a natural sweetness. It's also a good idea to get more sleep so you're not chronically exhausted and dependent on caffeine to get through the day.

**Your blood sugar is low.**

If you get irritable, shaky, or lightheaded and feel overwhelmed by everyday stressors, it could be that your adrenal glands need support. "Their job is to make more sugar during periods of stress," Teitelbaum says. "When they get exhausted from being chronically activated, your blood sugar will drop and you won't have the hormones to manage it."

**Your diet soda detox:** Teitelbaum advises dispensing with as many day-to-day stressors as you can — like, do you really need to watch TV news at breakfast and start your day with terrorism and tornadoes? He also suggests avoiding blood sugar dips by not skipping meals (aim for three meals and two snacks daily); spreading your protein throughout the day (add grilled chicken or chickpeas to that pasta salad); and keeping a supply of nourishing snacks (like a third of a cup of nuts and raisins) on hand for a blood sugar reboot. Nuts contain healthy fats that slow the absorption of sugar, and raisins have natural sugars that will bring you back into bal-

ance. You can also rehab your adrenal glands by taking supplements of vitamin C (500 mg) and vitamin B5 (50-100 mg) and by drinking licorice tea, Teitelbaum says.

### **You're (unconsciously) feeding yeast in your body.**

If you have chronic nasal congestion, sinusitis, spastic colon or irritable bowel syndrome, you could be heeding sugar cravings caused by yeast or candida overgrowth in your intestinal tract.

**Your diet soda detox:** "A good probiotic and getting off sugar will kill the yeasty beasts," Teitelbaum says. In the meantime, find a diet soda alternative that doesn't feel like punishment. Teitelbaum likes to trick out tea with stevia, cinnamon and nutmeg. Sandon recommends fruit-infused water or seltzer. "Lemon-flavored seltzer with a splash of cranberry juice is my favorite," she says.

### **Your hormones are in flux.**

If you're PMSing or heading into perimenopause, hormonal fluctuations can cause insomnia, headaches, fatigue or mild depression, all of which can trigger sugar cravings.

**Your diet soda detox:** Explore ways to kick up your estrogen, which increases the feel-good brain chemicals serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Teitelbaum recommends taking a page from Japanese women and grabbing a handful of edamame or drinking soy milk, because soy has plant compounds called isoflavones that mimic estrogen in the body. If that doesn't cut it and you need something sweet, have nature's treats — an orange, a banana, a handful of berries or two squares of dark chocolate.

It may take 7 to 10 days to stop craving diet soda, Teitelbaum says, depending on how well you're addressing the root cause. And if you still indulge occasionally, that's OK, too. "The bottom line is really to drink sodas of any kind in moderation," Sandon says. "By this I mean not every meal or every day. Save them for special occasions."