

Study: Regular restaurant eating can lead to poorer beverage choices for children

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New research has found that one of the most significant predictors for consuming sugary drinks -- such as soft drinks, fruit drinks, and sports drinks -- is a propensity for eating out. (Getty Images)

Eating out can lead to greater consumption of sugary drinks, which can have poor health outcomes for both children and adults, new research has confirmed.

A study led by researchers from Tulane University's [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) looked at links between sugary drink consumption and a variety of factors. Their research found that one of the most significant predictors for consuming sugary drinks -- such as soft drinks, fruit drinks, and sports drinks -- was a propensity for eating out.

In "[Factors Associated with High Sugary Beverage Intake Among Children in Louisiana: A Survey of Caregivers in New Orleans and Baton Rouge](#)," lead author [Dr. Melissa Fuster](#), associate professor in [Social, Behavioral, and Population Sciences](#), examined overall sugary beverage intake prior to the implementation of the New Orleans Healthy Kids Beverage Ordinance implemented in 2023. That ordinance requires restaurants in the city that serve children's meals to only offer plain water, nonfat or low-fat unflavored milk, or 6.75 oz of 100% fruit juice as the default choice.

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Melissa Fuster

"We found a significant association between restaurant use and overall child sugary beverage intake, supporting current regulation of beverages served in New Orleans restaurants," Fuster said.

According to Fuster, beverages like soft drinks and fruit drinks have significant health consequences, with little to no nutritional value. Consequences include increasing the risk for obesity and associated chronic conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

In the shorter term, sugary drinks can also lead to tooth decay. Moreover, many of these drinks also contain caffeine, which can then lead to poor sleep quality, hyperactivity, and other health issues.

"We also have to remember that these risks are not only for children, but also for adults," Fuster points out. "In children, the high consumption of sugary drinks then influences the continuation of this behavior later in life, further augmenting the risks

of these issues.”

The study also showed the importance of attitudes and beliefs, as parents and caregivers who viewed sugary drinks as important parts of family meals were more likely to report a high frequency of child sugary drink consumption, defined as four times a week or more - close to daily consumption. Those beliefs can be formed early in life.

The paper is the first for the project, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health and was conducted in collaboration with Xavier University’s Dr. Megan Knapp (PhD GCHB ‘20).

Noting that the group didn’t find significant associations by income or race/ethnic background, Fuster stressed that this is an issue that affects the broad population.