

Sugary Drinks May Be a Big Threat to Our Health

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Opinion Article

I used to consider myself a healthy person. I tried to eat nutritious foods, exercised every day, and managed stress reasonably well. That is why I was completely caught off guard when I experienced what turned out to be a gout attack in November 2025.

At first, I had no idea it was gout. One of the joints in my right hand became swollen, red, and painful, and I assumed I had suffered a minor injury while swimming. I occasionally bump my hand against the pool waterline, so a small fracture seemed like a reasonable explanation. Looking back, however, the timing was suspicious.

On Thanksgiving Day, my family had dinner with a friend's family at a buffet restaurant. My friend recommended the crab legs because they were especially fresh, so I enjoyed several. Within a day or two, one joint in my right hand became severely inflamed. After searching online, I realized that my symptoms resembled gout much more than a simple injury.

My first reaction was to blame the seafood. Since shellfish are known to contain purines, I assumed the crab legs had triggered the attack. I immediately began drinking large amounts of homemade lemonade made with lemons and generous amounts of honey because I believed it would help. Instead, my condition continued to worsen. The swollen joint became even larger and more painful. Around the same time, I also noticed that a small wound on the edge of my nose refused to heal despite using antibiotic ointment. These experiences made me step back and examine my eating and drinking habits more carefully.

A month later, another dinner with the same friend's family caused me to rethink my assumptions. While my friend happily continued eating crab legs and shrimp, I warned her about my recent gout attack. She smiled and said seafood had never caused her any problems. As I looked more closely, I noticed that her hands showed no signs of arthritis or gout, while her husband had obvious joint deformities.

What interested me even more was another difference between them. My friend rarely exercises, and she eats plenty of seafood. Her husband also enjoys seafood, but he drinks large amounts of Coca-Cola, while she drinks almost nothing sweet except plain water. That observation made me wonder whether I had been focusing on the wrong culprit. Perhaps seafood was only part of the story. Maybe sugar deserved much more attention.

Over the previous two years, I had gradually replaced my longtime habit of drinking green tea with homemade lemonade sweetened generously with honey. Working from home made it easy to skip making tea in the morning. Instead, every day after waking up, I drank two large mugs of lemonade on an empty stomach. Although I never developed high blood sugar, I gradually gained weight and occasionally experienced diarrhea. Then came the gout attack. This sequence of events made me question whether my daily sugar intake - particularly from honey dissolved in water - had been affecting my health more than I realized.

After researching the topic, I learned that honey contains large amounts of fructose and glucose. Scientific studies have suggested that excessive fructose consumption can increase uric acid production, which may contribute to gout in susceptible individuals [1]. This made me wonder whether my daily habit of drinking large amounts of honey-sweetened lemonade on an empty stomach had played a role in my own case. I decided to make a simple change.

I stopped drinking lemonade completely. Instead, I began every morning with a large glass of plain water and resumed drinking green tea before noon. Over the following months, I noticed encouraging changes. The swelling in my finger gradually subsided until it

was nearly gone after about seven months. The wound on my nose healed without additional treatment. My weight returned to normal, and overall, I felt healthier than before. Moreover, I still keep on eating large amounts of seafood every week, without any trouble.

Of course, my experience may not prove that sugary water caused my gout. Many factors, including genetics, body weight, kidney function, hydration, and overall diet, can contribute to elevated uric acid levels. Nevertheless, my own experience convinced me that sugary drinks deserve much more attention than they often receive.

For many years, people have associated gout primarily with eating too much meat or seafood. While those foods certainly contain purines, growing research also points to sugar - especially fructose - as another important factor that may increase uric acid production. In my opinion, this possibility deserves greater public awareness.

My personal experiences also changed how I think about fruit and sweet foods. I once assumed that natural sugars could never become a problem. Now I believe moderation is important, even when foods are considered healthy. I have also noticed similar health struggles among several friends with diets high in sugary drinks or sweet foods. For example, an old friend who passed away due to pancreatic cancer, and he seemed to eat fruits and yogurt as his lunch almost every day. Another friend who loved to drink this homemade lemonade in large amounts had problems with her back and neck. Another friend who ate grapes as his lunch was diagnosed with diabetes. These observations are purely anecdotal and certainly do not establish cause and effect, but together with my own experience they have made me more cautious. I would rather err on the side of moderation

than discover years later that I ignored an avoidable risk.

As a Christian, I cannot help thinking about the wisdom found in Proverbs 25:16 [2].

"If you find honey, eat just enough-too much of it, and you will vomit." Perhaps that ancient advice is more relevant today than ever. Many Americans struggle with obesity and diabetes, and I believe one practical lesson is worth remembering: eating whole fruit is generally preferable to drinking fruit juice because the fiber in fruit slows sugar absorption. Whether the beverage is soda, fruit juice, sweet tea, or homemade lemonade, consuming large amounts of sugary drinks - especially on an empty stomach—

may not be as harmless as we often assume. My experience taught me that sometimes the habits we believe are healthy deserve a second look. For me, replacing sugary drinks with plain water was a small change that made a meaningful difference, and it is one I intend to keep.

References

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