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## News + Trends

### Liquid Candy Gets Dissed



By Amy Paturel, M.S., M.P.H.

Soda sales are down for the first time in 20 years in the United States. Given soda's reputation as the Darth Vader of drinks, a sales slump is good news according to American nutritionists.

"Soda, whether regular or diet, offers no health benefit besides the water it contains," says Milton Stokes, M.P.H., R.D., of the American Dietetic Association. In fact, the nation's leading nutrition researchers recently issued guidelines urging Americans to cut back on soda, while allowing up to 40 ounces of coffee and tea per day -- and a little room for alcohol, too.

So, if you're a die-hard Diet Coke fan, what's the best thirst-quenching alternative? Here's a look at some options:

**Alcohol:** That's right. Alcohol may help slow the absorption of food and keep blood sugar levels in check (pasta with Chianti anyone?) And research shows that moderate drinking (one drink per day for women and two for men) may increase circulating leptin, a natural hormone that curbs the appetite for sweets. The drawback: Alcohol can lower inhibitions -- potentially zapping your ability to resist caloric temptations.

**Water:** Can't get jazzed about the plain stuff? Try seltzer. It provides pizzazz without the calories. Or add orange slices or strawberries to a pitcher of water for a fruity, refreshing flavor.

**Milk:** Skim or low fat, milk is quite possibly the most nutrient dense beverage available, says Stokes. "With nine essential nutrients, it's a true powerhouse. And there's emerging research suggesting that calcium from dairy may promote weight loss."

**Coffee:** America's no. 1 source of antioxidants, coffee is linked with a reduced risk of several chronic diseases. Just be careful not to sabotage your diet by pouring in tons of sugar and cream.

**Tea:** Research shows that green tea may promote weight loss. "It's not the answer to obesity, but it's a healthful addition to your diet," says Stokes. Don't bother with green tea supplements though. Just drink the actual tea. And if you use mint tea to placate your sweet tooth, you may be able to skip dessert.

Some soda substitutes are better left on the shelf altogether:

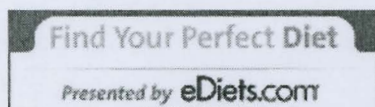
**Vitamin Waters:** "Skip 'em," says Stokes. "You're better off buying a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement and drinking plain water."

**Energy Drinks:** These concoctions are for endurance athletes, not the average American working out to lose weight. In fact, some energy drinks have as many calories and sugar grams as soda, and a hefty dose of caffeine, too.

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## Beware the Beverage

