

Hazards in the Home

Food - Drinks

Soft drinks

As the tentacles of the soft drinks multinationals spread all over the world it is plain that what they are selling are images not drinks. Advertising campaigns of the big two - Coca-cola and Pepsi - run into 100's of millions of dollars. Meanwhile, the health risks regarding some of the commonly-used ingredients of soft drinks give cause for concern.

Soft drinks contain between 10-15% sugar, up to 13 lumps per 330ml can.

Sugar can have health consequences ranging from dental caries, to diabetes and obesity. In addition, a can of cola can contain between 40-60mg of

caffeine, almost as much as a standard cup of coffee. Caffeine is a stimulant drug, which, if taken in unusually excessive amounts, can cause sleeplessness and other effects such as palpitations, stomach upsets, nausea and tinnitus (sounds in the ear or head).

Drinks without sugar and caffeine may be worse. These can contain:

- **Saccharin**, which has to carry a health warning in the US as it has been linked to the development of bladder cancer in laboratory animals.
- **Tartrazine (E102)**, which has been linked to hyperactivity in children.¹
- **Aspartame (E591)** is 200 times sweeter than sugar. It has been undergoing a study since 1999 by British scientists for a possible link to brain cancer.²

Other drinks

Tea and coffee are still more popular than soft drinks in the UK, but they can cause health problems if consumed in large quantities. Most are grown as cash crops, (grown for export rather than to feed local people), in developing countries and are often produced under dangerous working conditions, using workers paid very low wages, whilst multinational companies make huge profits. The Fair Trade symbol is said to be a guarantee of better conditions.

Milk

Residues of toxic chemicals such as the pesticide Lindane, (which is banned in many other countries because it is so dangerous) are regularly found in our supplies.³

Water

Contamination from pesticides, fertilisers, industrial and domestic waste costs millions of pounds to remove from our water.³ The European Union imposes strict targets for tap water quality.

Alternatives

Soy milk is the commonest alternative to cows' milk.¹

Herbal teas - herbal and fruit teas don't have the environmental impact of black teas and are becoming more popular. Herbs such as mint grow easily in a pot - two leaves in a cup of boiling water and you have a cheap and green cup of herbal tea.⁴

Things you can do



All householders have the right to have their water supply checked for quality and pollutants by their local authority, and to have problems remedied. If you have concerns about the purity of your water supply, contact your local council.

Some bottles are made from plastic containing PVC* which is linked to emissions of deadly dioxin.

Alternatives for cola

Make brass fittings, coins, badges and even false teeth come up like new. Just soak them for a couple of hours in a glass of cola.



*polyvinyl chloride

Sources of Information

1. Ethical Consumer Magazine (issue 42&57). www.ethicalconsumer.org
2. John Elkington and Julia Hailes (2000) *The New Food Guide*, Victor Gollancz
3. Lynda Brown (1998) *Organic Food*, Fourth Estate, London
4. Mark Sydenham (1996) *Green Home Handbook*, Friends of the Earth Scotland

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