

Sugary soft drinks linked to gout, say researchers

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The more sugary soft drinks, fruit juices and fruit men consume, the more likely they are to have gout, says a joint Canadian-American study.

The risk of gout was 85 per cent higher among men who had two or more servings of sugar-sweetened soft drinks per day compared with those who had less than one serving per month, say researchers with the University of British Columbia and Harvard University.

Risk also rose with increased levels of fructose, a fruit-based sweetener found in many foods. Researchers found the increase in risk for gout was independent of other risk factors such as body mass index, age, diuretic use, high blood pressure and alcohol intake.

The study was published in Friday's peer-reviewed British Medical Journal.

Gout is a joint disease that causes pain and swelling, brought on by too much uric acid in the blood, which leads to uric acid crystals collecting around the joints. It's most common in men over the age of 40.

Researchers followed 46,000 men aged 40 years and over with no history of gout. During 12 years of followup, they noted 755 newly diagnosed cases.

Conventional recommendations for gout have focused on reducing the consumption of alcohol and meat, especially liver and kidney, which have high levels of the organic compound purine. Uric acid results from the breakdown of purines.

Doctors do not generally recommend restricting sugar-sweetened soft drinks, fruit juices or fruits.

The authors of the BMJ study noted that sugar-sweetened soft drinks represent the largest single source of calories in the American diet. They also point out that guidelines for consuming fruits and vegetables may need to be reconsidered for those who suffer from gout.

"The latest dietary guidelines call for five to 13 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, depending on an individual's caloric intake," the authors write.

"These various benefits and risks associated with individual fructose-rich food items should be carefully considered in the potential public health applications of our findings."