

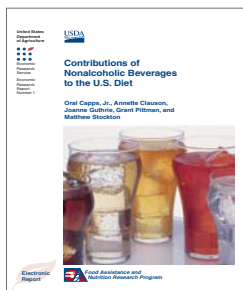
# ERS *Report Summary*

**Diet and Health**

Economic Research Service

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This is a summary  
of an ERS report.

Find the full report at  
[www.ers.usda.gov/  
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## Contributions of Nonalcoholic Beverages to the U.S. Diet

Oral Capps, Jr., Annette Clauson, Joanne Guthrie, Grant Pittman, and Matthew Stockton

Obesity is the most important nutrition-related health problem in America today, so the caloric and nutrient contribution of beverages to that problem is important to consider. Consumers are offered an ever-increasing number of choices among nonalcoholic beverages, and there is a trend toward decreased consumption of milk and increased consumption of other beverages, especially soft drinks and bottled water.

### *What Is the Issue?*

Understanding households' beverage choices, especially the choices made by low-income households and households with children, is important to guiding the government's nutrition recommendations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the lead Federal agency for providing nutrition information to the public. USDA uses the Food Guide Pyramid and related materials to give consumers information on food and beverage choices that contribute to a healthful diet. For example, the Food Guide Pyramid for Children recommends two servings from the milk group daily and includes a picture of a soft drink in the tip of the Pyramid, indicating that soft drinks should be consumed only occasionally.

Concerns have been raised that the trend of decreased milk consumption and increased soft drink consumption may contribute to excess calorie consumption and declining intakes of important nutrients such as calcium, especially for youths. Most Americans still eat the majority of their meals at home, but food prepared away from home—i.e., restaurant, fast-food, and take-out foods—plays a much more important role in today's diet than it did in previous decades. Given this shift, it is useful to consider how the beverage choices selected for at-home consumption may influence the beverage choices made by consumers when they are away from home. *Contributions of Nonalcoholic Beverages to the U.S. Diet* (ERR-1) focuses on the nutrient intake from nonalcoholic beverages purchased for at-home consumption. The study focuses on calories, calcium, vitamin C, and caffeine intake from nonalcoholic beverages.

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ERS is the main source of research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.



## What Did the Study Find?

**Household beverage choice can strongly affect the nutritional quality of the household food supply.** A household's beverage choices affect household caloric intake, an important consideration given America's current obesity problem. Beverage choices also impact calcium availability in the home food supply—our analysis indicates more households purchased soft drinks than milk.

Using the Daily Values on the Nutrition Facts portion of the food label as a reference, we find that nonalcoholic beverages purchased for at-home consumption provided, on a per-person basis:

- 10 percent of daily value for calories.
- 20 percent of the daily value for calcium.
- 70 percent of daily value for vitamin C.

The study also found that intake of calories and caffeine from nonalcoholic beverages consumed at home is significantly higher for households below 130 percent of the poverty level than for other households; by contrast intake of calcium and vitamin C from nonalcoholic beverages consumed at home is significantly lower for households below 130 percent of the poverty level.

The study results have implications for the design of USDA nutrition education provided through Food Stamp Nutrition Education, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Child Nutrition Programs, since improving beverage choices can add to the nutritional quality of children's diets.

## How Was the Study Conducted?

The 1999 ACNielsen Homescan data from 7,195 household panelists provide a national representation of all household-level purchases. These data were used to analyze the types of nonalcoholic beverages that U.S. households bought for at-home consumption. The primary objective of the study was to understand consumer demand and nutritional issues associated with nonalcoholic beverages purchased for at-home use, by looking at different demographics such as household size, household income, education level, and region. The analyzed beverages included milk, carbonated soft drinks, bottled water, fruit juices, fruit drinks, coffee, tea, and isotonic (sports drinks), focusing on the available calorie, calcium, vitamin C, and caffeine intake. Statistical analyses included the use of descriptive cross-tabulations and regression analyses. Profiles of households that were more likely or less likely to purchase the beverages and key demographic determinants associated with the probability of purchasing selected beverages were gleaned from the analyses.

