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American Heart Association statement on Framingham Study on soft drink consumption

Monday, July 23, 2007 – An observational study by Framingham researchers that showed an association with higher risks of developing the metabolic syndrome and multiple metabolic risk factors among people who consumed more than one diet or regular soft drink a day is being published today in the rapid access issue of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of cardiovascular disease and diabetes risk factors including excess waist circumference, high blood pressure, elevated triglycerides, low levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL “good” cholesterol) and high fasting glucose levels. The presence of three or more of the factors increases a person’s risk of developing diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

This study may raise some questions among consumers about health risks associated with drinking soft drinks. Since this is an observational study, it is important to note that the study does not show that soft drinks *cause* risk factors for heart disease. It does show that the people studied who drank soft drinks were more likely to develop risk factors for heart disease.

However, it is possible that other factors could explain this relationship. Often people who drink soft drinks also eat and drink more calories, saturated fat and *trans* fat and less fiber and dairy products. Also, these people tend to be less physically active. This was true among the subjects in this study.

While the authors did account for these aforementioned diet and lifestyle factors in the analysis, it is possible that other lifestyle factors still account for the measured increase in risk factors leading to heart disease. As the authors note in the study, more research is needed to understand these associations before any recommendations can be made to the public.

Diet soda can be a good option to replace caloric beverages that do not contain important vitamins and minerals. The American Heart Association supports dietary patterns that include low-calorie beverages like water, diet soft drinks, and fat-free or low-fat milk as better choices than full calorie soft drinks.

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