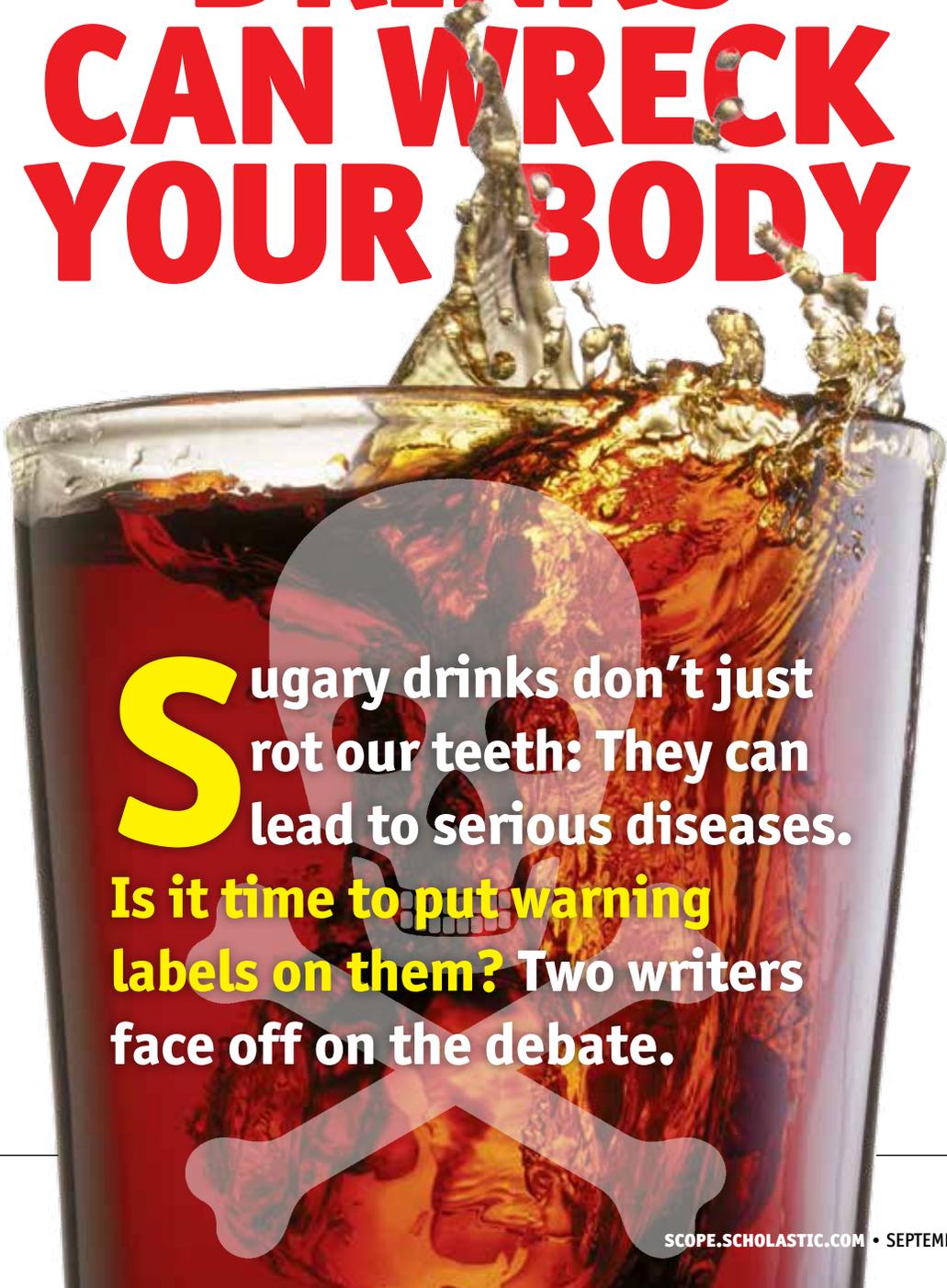


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Debate

# YOUR FAVORITE DRINKS CAN WRECK YOUR BODY



**S**ugary drinks don't just rot our teeth: They can lead to serious diseases.

**Is it time to put warning labels on them?** Two writers face off on the debate.



JACK ANDERSEN/PHOTOLIBRARY RM/GETTY IMAGES (SODA); SHUTTERSTOCK (SKULL AND CROSSBONES)



## Putting warning labels on sugary drinks would save lives **BY RUSS LLOYD**

**T**here is a killer on the loose. It lurks in grocery stores and restaurants. It may have found its way into your house. Perhaps, as you read these words, it is right next to you, waiting for the chance to strike.

This killer is not a flesh-eating zombie. It is not a deadly parasite, a poisonous snake, or a mutant bee.

It is a can of soda.

### Sugar Kills

The problem with soda and other sweet drinks is that they

contain an enormous amount of sugar. What's so bad about sugar? Well, it can rot your teeth and turn your liver into a **grotesque** lump of scar tissue. Eating too much of it can lead to **obesity** and put you at risk for heart disease, **diabetes**, and so many other health problems that to list them all here would fill up the page. Dr. Robert Lustig, a pediatrician and expert on how sugar affects the human body, calls the stuff "poison."

It's not surprising, then, that some people in California want to

put warning labels on soda and other sugary drinks. The California Senate recently passed a bill designed to do just that, and it may soon become a law.

Let's hope it does—and that other states follow California's lead.

Why?

Because you deserve to know when you're about to put something in your body that can make you sick—or worse.

### Crazy for Sugar!

Our devotion to sugar began about 10,000 years ago when the people of New Guinea had what turned out to be a bad idea: to grow sugarcane as a crop. The ancient New Guineans chewed the raw plant, and, not surprisingly, they liked it. In fact, they liked it so much that sugar became a part of their religion. According to one myth, a stalk of sugarcane was the mother of the human race.

Humans have been in love with sugar for centuries, but it was only recently that we began consuming it in crazy amounts. In the 1800s, the average American consumed about six teaspoons of sugar per day. Today, the average American eats more than 22 teaspoons of sugar a day. That's 77 pounds per year—a mind-boggling amount.

### The More You Eat

Why are we eating so much sugar?

One reason is that about 40 years ago, a bunch of scientists and government officials began

telling Americans that the fat in our food was making us fat. So we started eating more low-fat foods.

But food without fat tends to taste like cardboard—unless you sweeten it. So sweeten it we did. Now sugar seems to be in everything.

Unfortunately, sugar is addictive. The more you eat, the more you want. In fact, brain scans reveal that eating sugar affects the same parts of the brain as addictive drugs. Some research shows that sugar is even more addictive than cocaine! (If you've ever lifted your cereal bowl to slurp down that last bit of sugary milk, you can see how this could be true.)

### APPLE? OR APPLE JUICE?

Fruit has a lot of sugar. Fruit juice has a lot of sugar. What's the difference? Fruit has fiber that allows sugar to be absorbed slowly. Juice has no fiber. Drinking juice is like a sugar shot right to your guts!



### The Worst

But wait.

Isn't it unfair to single out sugary drinks like soda when sugar is added to so many of the foods we eat every day?

The answer is no.

Sugary drinks are by far the biggest source of added sugar in the diets of young Americans. Exactly how much sugar is OK for kids depends on factors such as their age and height, but the American Heart Association puts it somewhere between

four and nine teaspoons for the entire day.

A single 12-ounce can of soda contains a whopping 8 teaspoons!

While consuming a lot of sugar

in any form is bad, *drinking* a lot of sugar is particularly terrible. The body absorbs the sugar in liquids more quickly than the sugar in solid food. When you chug down a bottle of soda, you send a truckload of fructose straight to your liver. (Fructose is a sweet type of sugar that occurs naturally in fruit and honey. It is found in most sweeteners, including white sugar and high fructose corn syrup.) Some of that fructose turns into fat, which can build up in your liver. The same thing happens to alcoholics after years of drinking.

### Warning Labels Work

You know who doesn't want warning labels on sugary drinks? The beverage corporations that spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to get you to buy their drinks. The fact that these companies are against warning labels is as good a sign as any that labels will work.

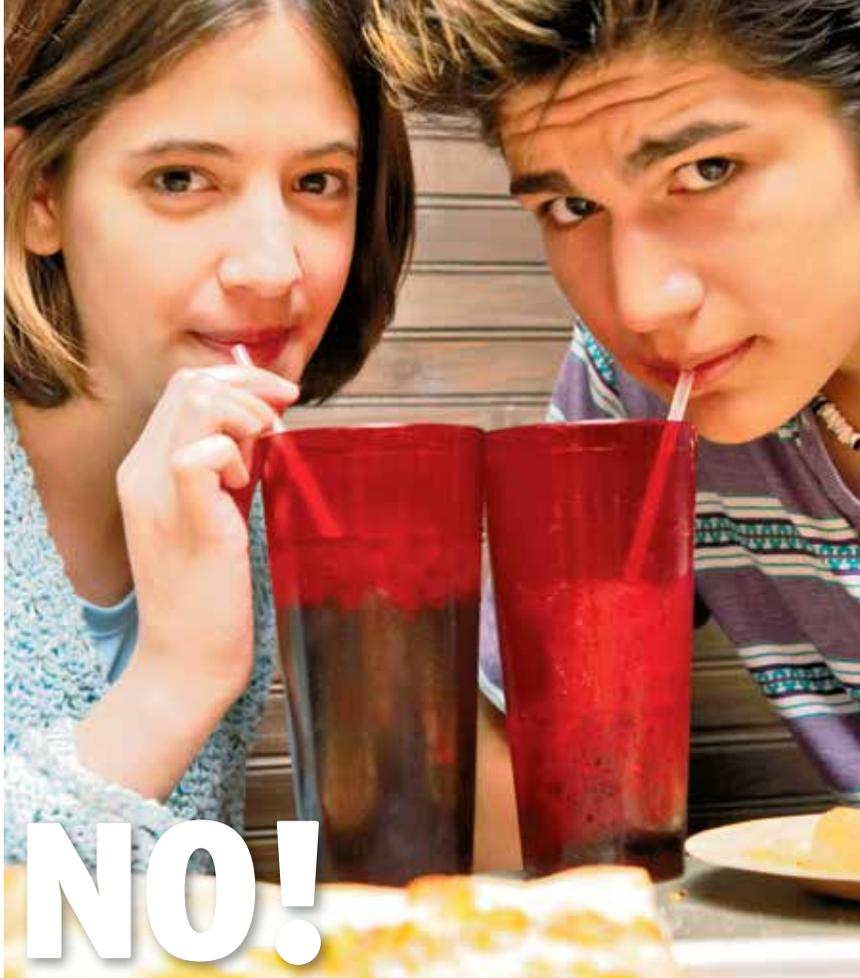
But in case we need more evidence, there's also this: Anti-smoking measures, including warning labels, are estimated to have saved about 8 million American lives since 1964.

That's 8 million people who didn't die because they **heeded** warnings that smoking would kill them.

How many lives might warning labels on sugary drinks save? ●

PAGE 18: EMRAH TURUDUJE/GETTY IMAGES (CAN); SHUTTERSTOCK (SKULL AND CROSSBONES); PAGE 19: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (ALL PHOTOS)

SOURCES: JAMA PEDIATRICS STUDY AND THE CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH



## Let us enjoy our sweet drinks in peace

BY EVAN COOK

**W**arning labels on sugary drinks? That's a ridiculous idea that won't solve any problems. Yet, that's exactly what lawmakers in California are proposing.

Don't get me wrong. Sweet drinks are a problem. More specifically, obesity is a problem—a very serious problem—in the United States. Some 17 percent of kids and a third of adults are obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And obesity is a leading cause of diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

As a nation, we must take steps to better protect our health. But bombarding soda drinkers with warning labels won't help.

### Wrong Approach

First of all, soda is not the only cause of obesity. Not even close. Inactivity and overeating can both contribute to obesity. And as a representative for CalBev, California's branch of the American Beverage Association, points out, "Only 4 percent of calories in the average American diet are **derived** directly from soda."

Second of all, if we start putting

warning labels on our drinks, what will we put warning labels on next? Sugar is in *everything*. Should we put warning labels on every box of cereal, every jar of tomato sauce, every package of bread?

How about on apples? One apple contains about 21 grams of sugar—more than half the sugar in a can of soda. Having too many labels defeats the point; the more warning labels there are, the less impact the warnings will have.

Beverage companies are already making efforts to help Americans be healthier. Coca-Cola, for example, displays calorie counts on the front of nearly all of its packaging, and it sponsors more than 280 physical activity and nutrition education programs around the world.

Should beverage companies really be punished with obnoxious warning labels?

There's no guarantee that warning labels will even work. **Psychological** studies have shown, for instance, that for cigarette smokers, warning labels that tell them they're going to die might tempt them to smoke *more*. The fact is that people who love soda are going to keep drinking soda.

Besides, there's already a warning label on every sugary drink—and on pretty much every food and beverage product sold in the U.S., actually. It's called "Nutrition Facts," and it includes everything anyone could possibly want to know about what's in the thing they're about to eat or drink.

JACK HOLLINGSWORTH/CORBIS

### A Better Solution

If lawmakers are so convinced that they have to stop us from drinking sweet beverages, then why not try something that could actually work: a soda tax. A big reason why soda is so popular is that it's so cheap. A tax would make it expensive, and people wouldn't want to buy so much of it.

In a 2009 article in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, professors Kelly Brownell and Thomas Frieden found that taxing soda just one penny per ounce could lower soda drinking by 10 percent. That makes sense. Cigarette taxes have already proven successful in reducing smoking. Plus, the money earned could go toward helping to fight obesity.

### Leave Us Alone

Before California wastes time and money on absurd warning labels, its leaders should consider that other efforts to separate Americans from their favorite drinks have failed. In 2012, then New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed a ban on selling large-sized sodas outside of grocery stores. The city's Board of Health passed the law, but it was **overturned** in court. A panel of judges ruled that the Board of Health did not have the authority to tell people what to buy.

In other words, the government has no right to mess with our drinks.

You hear that, California? Back off. ●

## What Do You Think?

### Should sugary drinks have warning labels?

Identify the supporting evidence each author uses in his argument. Write the information on the lines below.



## YES

Those drinks are dangerous!

1 Sugar is addictive.

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## NO

Who needs the sugar police?

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**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide what you think. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay.

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