

Is Diet Soda Bad for You?

The ingredients in a Diet Coke will give you some clues.

- **Carbonated water** - Water plus carbon dioxide = carbonic acid (the “bite” in soda), not so bad.
- **Caramel color** - Brown coloring made from heating any one of a variety of sugars. Allergic reactions are most common concern.
- **Phosphoric acid** - Binds to magnesium and calcium in the digestive tract, which aren’t then well absorbed. May or may not impact bone formation and kidney stones, depending on quantity consumed. Erodes tooth enamel.
- **Aspartame** - An artificial sweetener prevalent in diet sodas. While it has been studied for years to determine whether it is carcinogenic or may contribute to overeating or other health concerns such as high blood pressure, high “bad” and low “good” cholesterols, high triglycerides, and abdominal fat (all components of metabolic syndrome), results are inconclusive and have no proven cause and effect.
- **Potassium benzoate** - a preservative with minimal risk of toxicity.
- **Natural flavors** - Flavor formulations are proprietary and secret (?).
- **Citric acid** - A preservative that can erode tooth enamel.
- **Caffeine** - A widely used central nervous

system stimulant, extensively studied and likely added for an immediate sense of energy, with a potential for dependence.

Ingredients in other diet sodas are similar, if not more extensive, chemical combinations.

One proven concern is that both diet and regular sodas contain phosphoric and citric acids and, if sipped throughout the day, are really bad for your teeth. Studies indicate that it would take an extraordinary amount of soda to actually impact bone formation or contribute to kidney stones. The caffeine in diet soda is likely a primary reason the habit is so difficult to kick, although many report that they love the carbonation.

More importantly, diet soda drinkers may have other self-care habits (diet, exercise, smoking, etc.) that contribute to developing poor health beyond that of the diet soda itself.

Bottom line: Diet sodas provide no nutrition, have some negative health impacts, and may have other health risks with long term or high volume use which are still being studied. Currently there is no evidence that they are carcinogenic. Take stock of your overall health habits and if a diet soda a couple of times a week is your biggest vice, you probably don’t have much to worry about. As always, the decision is up to you.



CAMPUS HEALTH

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Food and nutrition services (including healthy eating, cooking skills, weight management, digestive problems, hormonal and cardiovascular diseases, and eating disorders) are offered year-round at Campus Health. Call (520) 621-6483 to make an appointment.