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Diet Coke: An Unhealthy Alternative to an Unhealthy Drink

While drinking my third can of diet coke of the day, guilt-free, my inquisitive self wanted to find out if the 0 calories written on its label actually makes it any better than regular coke. From a layman's perspective, it must be a better option as it does not influence our daily calorie intake like the regular coke does and tastes nearly identical to the regular coke. Diet Coke uses aspartame, an artificial sweetener, to attain the same taste as that of regular coke. It has always been marketed as the "healthy" alternative but with numerous diseases and addiction linked to it, it is everything but a healthy alternative.

Diet Coke was invented during the 1980s when the fitness craze was just starting to take over the world. (Dart; "The Extraordinary Story of How Diet Coke Came to Be.") Today, the craze is at an all-time high with everyone preaching for a healthy and active lifestyle, and it has become very common for people to track what they eat and how much they eat. And let us not forget about the keto diet, a diet in which you completely omit carbohydrates from your meals. So, it is a given that health-conscious people tend to avoid sugary drinks such as coke which contains excessive sugar. Now, that has given a rise to the popularity of diet coke. Why wouldn't it? It tastes identical to the regular coke but does not have all those calories that come from high sugar quantity in regular coke. And of course, the 0 calories on the label makes drinking it as guilt-free as drinking water. Though people may think drinking diet coke is the same as drinking water, it is, if not worse, as unhealthy as regular coke.



A can of Diet Coke showing with its label proudly saying “NO SUGAR NO CALORIES”

Though marketed as a better alternative to regular coke for staying fit and not gaining any weight, there are studies done to show that drinking diet coke has directly been related to weight gain. A report by Qing Yang, named “Gain weight by ‘going diet?’ Artificial sweeteners and the neurobiology of sugar cravings”, shows a collection of studies done that all show a positive correlation of artificial sweeteners used to Diet Coke and weight gain. In the same report, Yang also talks about how artificial sweeteners used in Diet Coke increase our hunger level more than sugar or glucose do, and because they are so sweet, they promote sugar cravings and addiction towards it which all contributes to obesity. This shows that the “healthy” alternative to regular coke might not be all that healthy after all.

Diet coke is more habit-forming than the regular one. Famous personalities such as Donald Trump, drinking a dozen cans of diet coke every single day shows how addictive it can get. (Eltagouri) In an article named “Can you get hooked on diet soda?”, the author, Denise Mann, talks about a woman whose Diet Coke drinking habit sounds like that of an addict, and how she panics when she is out of Diet Coke and how she needs another glass as soon as she is done drinking a glass of Diet Coke. (Mann) One explanation for it could be aspartame, the artificial

sweetener used in Diet Coke, which is said to be 200 times sweeter than regular sugar. (Mandl)

A study done on cocaine-addicted rats by Magalie Lenoir, et al, named “Intense Sweetness Surpasses Cocaine Reward” showed that those rats preferred intense sweetness over cocaine. (Lenoir) This goes on to show how intense sweetness can even surpass the reward from cocaine, even in drug-addicted individuals. This helps to explain why Diet Coke can be so addictive.

In addition to being super addictive, there are many studies done that show how drinking diet coke can cause life-threatening diseases. In an article named “Diet Soda: Good or Bad?”, author Elise Mandl talks about these studies that have linked diet soda to type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and an increased risk of stroke and even depression. (Mandl) With diet sodas being associated with so many diseases, it is safe to say that it is not a “healthy” alternative.

While drinking a regular coke, we all at least know that it is calorie-heavy and has many adverse effects on our body. But with diet coke, the unhealthy factor stays invisible to many of us. All the studies done on diet coke show that it has all the bad aspects that we get from drinking regular coke but also many other diseases that we don’t even get from drinking regular coke. Instead of showing diet coke is a better alternative to regular coke, these studies show the contrary.

Sugar and other calorie-heavy sweeteners have always been blamed for causing obesity and being addictive, giving rise to alternative drinks like Diet Coke. But with Diet Coke also being linked to obesity and being so compelling, this cannot and should not be promoted and marketed as a healthier alternative. Most of us, by now, know that in this capitalistic world, where every company is doing their absolute best to promote and market their products in order to make as much money as they can, we are often manipulated and tricked into buying their products. Diet Coke is no exception. With all the evidence we have, we can say that it is, if not worse, as

damaging as the regular coke. Products like this also help us realize how much of the choreographed information we are being fed, and how important it is to be mindful of the products we intake.

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