

Grapefruit & Breast Cancer



It's hard to believe, but grapefruit may raise the risk of breast cancer.

In a study of 50,000 postmenopausal women, those who averaged at least half a grapefruit every other day had a 30 percent higher risk than those who didn't eat grapefruit. (The researchers couldn't estimate the impact of grapefruit juice because their questionnaire combined it with orange juice.)

Experts suspect that grapefruit may boost cancer risk by raising estrogen levels in the blood.

In 1989, researchers discovered that grapefruit juice inhibits a key enzyme (cytochrome p450 3A4) in the liver and small intestine that metabolizes drugs as well as a woman's own estrogen. The juice can cause higher blood levels of estrogen and of 60 percent of all drugs taken orally, and the impact can last for up to 24 hours after you drink a 6-ounce glass.

What to do: Until more research is done, don't eat a half-grapefruit more than once or twice a week. And drink grapefruit juice only occasionally. As a general rule, though, you're better off eating any fruit than drinking any juice.

Brit. J. Cancer 97: 440, 2007.

Is Obesity Contagious?

You're more likely to become obese if you have a sibling, spouse, or friend who is obese, say researchers who tracked more than 12,000 people who participated in the Framingham Heart Study from 1971 to 2003.

But not all friends are equal.

Women are influenced by other women only if they are mutual friends, the researchers found. Men are influenced by other men whether or not the friendship is mutual—that is, even if only one of the two identifies the other as a friend. And friends of the opposite sex have no impact.

The likeliest explanation: "People come to think that it is okay to be bigger since those around them are bigger, and this sensibility spreads," says co-author Nicholas Christakis of the Harvard Medical School.

What to do: Don't worry that you'll "catch" obesity like you can catch a cold. But be aware that a friend's weight may influence your thinking and eating. Of course, there's always the flip side. Maybe *your* example will get your friends to move more and eat less.

N. Engl. J. Med. 357: 370, 404, 2007.

THE METABOLIC SYNDROME & SODA

People who drink at least one (regular or diet) soda a day are more likely to be diagnosed with the metabolic syndrome, say researchers who tracked roughly 9,000 men and women for four years.

The metabolic syndrome, which raises the risk of heart disease and diabetes, applies to anyone with at least three of the following:

- **waist:** at least 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men
- **fasting blood sugar:** at least 100
- **triglycerides:** at least 150
- **blood pressure:** at least 135 over 85
- **HDL ("good") cholesterol:** less than 50 for women and less than 40 for men.

The risk of being diagnosed with the syndrome was 44 percent higher in people who consumed at least one soft drink a day than in those who consumed less.

What to do: To stay trim, avoid sugar-sweetened sodas. But based on just one study, it's too early to say whether diet soda might lead to weight gain and other features of the metabolic syndrome.

Odds are that the diet-soda drinkers in this study did other things that increased their risk. For example, they ate more bad fat and less fiber, and they were more likely to smoke. The researchers adjusted for those and other known "confounders," but they could have missed others.

Your best option: drink water.

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