

Youths switching from full sugar drinks to diet

By Allison Aubrey, NPR

Diet soda, once the soft drink of choice for adults watching their calories, isn't just for grown ups anymore. Increasingly, kids are getting their fix, too.

In fact, consumption of diet drinks has doubled among U.S. children over a decade. About 1 in 4 of adults drink low-calorie or no-calorie sweetened drinks and foods. And for children: Six percent were consuming diet drinks in 1999-2000. This increased to 12.5 percent in 2007-08. The findings were recently published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

So, if parents are helping kids cut calories and sugar by offering diet drinks, is this good for kids' health?

"This is the \$64,000 question," researcher Barry Popkin tells the Salt. Popkin is the author of "The World is Fat: The Fads, Trends, Policies, and Products That Are Fattening the Human Race", and a professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

On one hand, there's some evidence that replacing soda and juices with calorie-free beverages can help teenagers control their weight. There's also a study that found diet soda drinkers were less likely to develop metabolic syndrome, as long as they were eating a prudent diet.

But on the other hand? Popkin says some people seem to use diet sodas to rationalize a very unhealthy diet – the "I'll have a Diet Coke With That Big Mac" crowd.

Read the whole story