

Frequently Asked Questions:

When will the hospital stop selling sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB)?

The new policy is effective as of January 1, 2012.

What areas are affected?

The healthy beverage initiative will affect all Lebanon campus vendors that sell SSB. These include:

- Food and Nutrition Services: Dining Room, East Mall Café, catering
- Vending machines at all onsite and offsite Lebanon office locations
- Food Court vendors including Au Bon Pain, Sbarro, Cravin's

Plans are for the policy to expand to off-site and southern locations after initial implementation occurs on the main campus.

Why is the hospital making this change?

To promote the health and well-being of our patients, families and staff, we will no longer sell sugar-sweetened beverages. As a healthcare institution we are committed to our mission of advancing health and to creating a healthy work environment.

Sugar-sweetened beverages have been linked to obesity and other chronic disease such as type-2 diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

While we respect individual choice, selling sugar-sweetened beverages at our facility does not support our mission and vision.

Other hospitals that have already made this change include Cleveland Clinic and Gifford Medical Center. Several Boston area hospitals have adopted this policy including Carney Hospital and Fairview Hospital. Others have active taskforces around the issue in progress including Children's Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. The city of Boston has also stopped selling sugar-sweetened beverages.

What are sugar-sweetened beverages?

Any drink that contains added sugar. Added sugars can be from natural sources (such as white sugar, brown sugar, honey, agave nectar) or man-made sweeteners (such as high fructose corn syrup).

Examples of sugar-sweetened beverages are:

- regular sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks
- sweetened iced teas, coffees, lemonades, and punches
- fruit or vegetable drinks that are not 100% juice
- flavored waters containing calories

What drinks are available under this new policy?

Water, seltzers, sugar-free or diet drinks, unsweetened coffee and teas, all milks, soymilk beverages, 100% fruit and vegetable juices. You will see an expanded selection of these beverages.

Why not stop selling candy and desserts too?

Liquids don't make us feel full in the same the way solid food does. When people drink sugar-sweetened beverages they do not compensate by eating less, therefore those calories from the drink become "extra". Studies looking at weight loss have shown that decreasing liquid calories lead to greater weight reduction than decreasing calories from solid food. That said, as part of a healthy diet sweets should be consumed in moderation.

But don't milk and juice have sugars?

Milk contains a natural sugar called lactose. Flavored milks, such as chocolate and strawberry, these do contain added sugars, and therefore it is recommended to drink sweetened milks in moderation. Milk is a good source of important nutrients and will continue to be sold in all forms.

100% juice contains a natural sugar called fructose and no added sugars. A serving size for juice is 4 to 6 fluid ounces. Recommendations are to limit juice to one serving per day and get the rest of your fruit servings from fruit.

What about diet drinks? Artificial sweeteners and weight control.

Artificial sweeteners are sugar substitutes that provide sweetness but virtually no calories. They are regulated by the FDA which reviews and approves them as safe prior to being sold. Over the years there have been concerns about possible health effects from consuming artificial sweeteners, specifically increased cancer risk. The National Cancer Institute states that “there is no clear evidence that the artificial sweeteners available commercially in the United States are associated with cancer risk in humans.” While deemed safe, moderation is always a good approach.

While there is strong evidence to support cutting back on sugary drinks, the science isn’t as clear about diet drinks when it comes to weight control. There is some evidence to suggest that regular use might be associated with weight gain. Diet soda can be a useful transition step away from sugar-sweetened beverages, but consumption is not encouraged over the long term. Diet drinks may not be the best substitute for their sugary counterparts, thus it is recommended to choose drinks that are naturally free of added sugars most often.

What if I still want a regular soda or other sugar-sweetened beverage?

Employees, patients and families are able to bring in their own, but the hospital will no longer sell these beverages.

I’m a healthy, active adult. Can I have a sugary drink on occasion?

Yes. Everyone has a budget of calories they can consume in a day and it includes some fun foods. Your daily calorie needs are estimated based on age, gender and activity level. After you meet your nutrition needs from the food groups, the remaining calories, called discretionary calories, can be used on foods and drinks that are higher in sugar, fat and/or alcohol, or extra servings from within a food group.

What if a patient needs regular soda for a medical reason?

At this time regular Coke and Ginger ale will be available for patients. This policy may be revisited in the future. There are alternatives to sugar-sweetened beverages that can often be used (see FAQs following).

Many patients use ginger ale for nausea management. What are alternatives?

Ginger is a widely used remedy for nausea. Any product containing real ginger can help to settle an upset stomach, such as ginger tea, ginger snaps, crystallized ginger or ginger pills. Most ginger ales on the market today actually don’t have much if any real ginger in them. That said, many people still report it helps. Other dietary tips for nausea management include:

- snacking on crackers, toast, dry cereal
- more frequent small meals and snacks
- try bland foods, without odor; avoid fatty spicy foods
- smell a lemon

Sweetened beverages such as soda can be used to treat hypoglycemia. What are alternatives?

100% fruit juice provides just as much sugar as a soda and is a fast acting source of glucose for someone whose blood sugars are low. Other dietary choices include honey, table sugar or frosting.

I use soda or energy drinks for the caffeine. What are alternatives?

Individuals may still bring soda onto hospital property if caffeine is needed. Many diet or sugar-free versions of these drinks contain caffeine. Coffee, tea and chocolate are also caffeine sources. There are many ways to increase alertness that don't depend on caffeine including:

- Getting a good night's sleep
- Exercise, being active
- Don't skip meals, especially breakfast
- Relax, meditate
- Listen to a favorite song
- Get some sunshine
- Drink plenty of water