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Coconut water fortifies diet when substituted for non nutritive drinks, research shows

By Hank Schultz , 03-May-2013

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Coconut water can make a positive nutritional contribution to the diet if it is used to replace high calorie, non nutritional beverages, according to new research presented the recent Experimental Biology conference in Boston.

One of the authors of the report, Cathy Kapica, PhD, who an adjunct professor of nutrition at Tufts University near Boston, said she and her colleagues wanted to see if coconut water could be a viable substitute for the significant slice of the US nutritional pie occupied by non nutritive beverages.

"We did look at overall beverage consumption in the US, and pretty much everybody on a daily basis drinks something that is a non nutritional beverage," Kapica told FoodNavigator-USA.

"The goal was to see how including coconut water into the diet, specifically by replacing non nutritional soft drinks, that is carbonated beverages, fruit drinks, sports drinks and energy drinks, what are the impacts on the nutrient content of the diet.

"Bottom line: You decrease sugars, you decrease calories and, more importantly you increase some nutrients that have been identified as being in short supply in the US diet, and that is potassium and magnesium," she said.

Benefits of potassium

Kapica said the potassium contribution was especially beneficial, as potassium works in concert with sodium, which is in high supply in the US diet. Fruits and vegetables are the dietary sources of potassium, and US consumers apparently aren't eating enough of these to offset their sodium intake.

"The issue why potassium is so important there are a lot of conversation around that people consume too much sodium. Sodium and potassium work in a ratio; you want as much potassium and sodium in your system or preferably more potassium," Kapica said.



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The research was funded by Vita Coco and used its product, and the results are specific to Vita Coco, Kapica said. Vita Coco differs from other coconut water products on the market in that it is

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not reconstituted, so the nutrient content of the fluid in the coconut is what ends up in the container. And the company is different, too, she said, in that it controls its own coconut production. While coconut water is a natural product and therefore has natural variability, Kapica said the company has quality controls to assure a consistent product.

Vita Coco has 60 calories per 8.5 oz serving, and delivers 515 mg of potassium and 180% of the daily intake of vitamin C. The Coca Cola Company quotes its flagship beverage as having 240 calories in 20 ounces, which works out to about 102 calories in a 8.5 oz serving. And Coke, of course, provides no nutrients.

Study design

The nutritional impact of replacing beverages with coconut water was assessed by modeling dietary data from WWEIA/NHANES 2007–2010. Nutrient intake from beverages consumed by adults aged 19+ y (n=11,481) were determined using combination codes to classify beverages and account for additions. Categories included milk & milk drinks; fruit/vegetable juices; carbonated soft drinks (CSD) & fruit/sports/energy drinks; coffee/tea & misc. beverages; water; and alcohol. Vita Coco nutrient composition analyses (n=155) were averaged and used to determine energy, fat, carbohydrate, sugars, protein, vitamin C, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, iron, sodium and potassium intakes if Vita Coco replaced CSD & fruit/sports/energy drinks.

Modeled nutrient intakes from replaced beverages were all significantly different than baseline. Calories were reduced by 36 kcal, total sugars were reduced by 14 grams and vitamin C (+186 mg), Ca (+49 mg), P (+12 mg), Mg (+53 mg), Fe (+0.4 mg), Na (+120 mg) and K (+805 mg) were increased (p<0.01). These beverage changes had an impact on total dietary intakes by increasing vitamin C, Mg and K (p<0.01), Na and calcium (p<0.05); carbohydrate and sugars intakes and the Na/K ratio were lower (p<0.01) than baseline.

Source: [The FASEB Journal](#), published April 9, 2013;27:1b365.

“Replacing beverages with Vita Coco coconut water can decrease dietary intake of sugars and increase vitamin C, calcium, magnesium and potassium intakes by adults aged 19 years and older: What We Eat in America (WWEIA/NHANES 2007–2010).”

Authors: Debra R Keast, Cathy M Kapica and Sharon M Hoerr.

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