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HEALTH

# YOUR HAIR CAN REVEAL SOME INTERESTING DETAILS ABOUT WHAT YOU DRINK

May. 25, 2013 8:05am | Liz Klimas

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When most people think of taking a hair sample for analysis, they're probably looking into DNA. But a new study suggests it could also reveal how much soda a person has been drinking.



The proteins in one's hair could hold an isotope that is indicative of how much soda one drinks. (Photo: Shutterstock.com)

With some recommendations to [tax sugary drinks](#) and [others seeking to ban large size sodas](#) due to their supposed link to obesity, figuring out just how much of an impact drinking such beverages has on health — without having to rely on a study participants' word on it — might help scientists more accurately understand the role it plays.

The research [published in the Journal of Nutrition](#) by scientists with the Center for Alaska Native Health Research out of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks states that having some sort of "dietary biomarker" associated with a "sugar-sweetened beverages" could help show just how much sodas and other sugary drinks contribute to obesity and health other conditions.

Previous studies had shown a carbon isotope (C-13 gets) could be a good biomarker, but the researchers wanted to evaluate if it could be sampled from a person in a non-invasive manner (from a hair sample) and if other dietary intake would affect its measurement and therefore skew the results.

NPR [has more from the researchers about how](#) this all could server to indicate how much soda a person is drinking:

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Researcher Diane O'Brien of the University of Alaska and her colleagues have used carbon isotope analysis to develop their measuring tool. "We're isolating the [carbon] isotope ratio in a specific molecule," explains O'Brien. The molecule is an amino acid called alanine, which captures carbon from sugars.

It turns out that when you consume sweetened soda, slightly more of a particular kind of carbon called C-13 gets trapped in alanine and incorporated into proteins. And proteins hang around in the body much longer than sugar does. So the scientists say they can sample proteins to look for extra amounts of C-13 in alanine. People with a lot of C-13 are likely to be people who have consumed a lot of corn syrup and cane sugar.

Using this technique, O'Brien says, you can capture a longer-term picture of sugar consumption compared with urine samples — which only reveal how much sugar a person has consumed in the past day or so.

Scientists not involved with the study called the findings "interesting" but believe they are preliminary and at this time are too expensive to carry out on a more useful scale.

Featured image via Shutterstock.com.

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