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Contacts: [Elizabeth Lutz](#), The Health Collaborative, 481-2573
[Leni Kirkman](#) or [Don Finley](#), University Health System, Office: 358-2335 Pager: 203-3300
[Laura Jesse](#), Bexar County, 787-9038

Sugar: You drink more than you think!

New coalition of community groups launches a local campaign to show families how much sugar they're drinking, and to encourage them to consider healthier alternatives

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Do you know how much sugar you — or your kids — consume each day, just in the form of sweetened drinks like soda, sweet tea, energy drinks and fruit-flavored beverages?

Most people don't. It turns out that a single sugary drink can contain the equivalent of 10, 16 or even 22 packets of sugar. And that's a concern, since a growing number of experts say that people should limit sugar and sugary drinks to prevent weight gain, diabetes, heart disease and other health risks.

A new campaign by a broad-based coalition of groups called the Bexar Healthy Beverage Coalition aims to make it easier for local families to find out — and to pick healthier alternatives.

The campaign, titled ***"Is Your Drink Sugar-Packed?"*** launches today with videos, posters and educational materials in both English and Spanish. They can be found online at a new website, **www.sugar-packed.com**. Additional materials will be added in the weeks to come.

The website also includes an easy-to-use sugar calculator that can tell you how much sugar is in commonly-consumed sugary beverages, and how much you're consuming over time.

"The purpose of this campaign is not to regulate what people consume, but to inform the public so they can make better decisions for themselves and their families," County Judge Nelson

Wolff said. “When you have all of the facts related to the health effects of sugar-sweetened beverages, it can be pretty alarming.”

Bexar County Commissioners Court passed a resolution in February supporting a campaign to educate local residents about how much sugar they’re consuming in beverages, given the concerns about obesity and diabetes in South Texas.

A federal nutrition advisory group recommends that added sugar should make up no more than 10 percent of daily calories — or about 12 teaspoons a day for the average adult. A single 16-ounce sugary drink can contain that much or more. Other groups, including the World Health Organization and the American Heart Association, recommend even less added sugar per day.

“We need to work with the community so that area residents can make informed beverage choices and better understand the impact of sugary beverages on their health,” said Elizabeth Lutz, executive director of The Health Collaborative. “Obesity and diabetes are priority areas of greatest concern for our community as identified by the 2013 Bexar County Community Health Assessment, a comprehensive report of local health compiled by The Health Collaborative. Through a countywide Community Health Improvement Plan process, reducing the consumption of sugary beverages was identified as a key strategy in addressing the prevalence of obesity and diabetes.”

Dr. Bryan Alsip, chief medical officer of University Health System, recommends that people consider sugary drinks as if they were liquid candy bars — a high-calorie treat that should be consumed sparingly.

“Sugar-sweetened drinks are a contributor to the rise in obesity and are associated with adverse health conditions, both in our community and around the world,” Dr. Alsip said. “Sugar itself is a also major factor in tooth decay and gum disease, especially in children. “If you’re thirsty, drink water. Water quenches our thirst better, is abundantly available, and is what our bodies need for hydration. Drinking water instead of sugary drinks is a simple way to eliminate unnecessary calories from your diet and to improve your health.”

“Just as parents, school leaders, coaches and church leaders should encourage healthy drink choices for those they’re responsible for, employers can take steps to make sure that when people are thirsty, the easiest choice is either water or another healthy alternative,” said Julie Tatum, president of the San Antonio Business Group on Health.

Partners in the Bexar Healthy Beverage Coalition include the American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, Bexar County, Bexar County Medical Society, Bexar County School Board Coalition, The Health Collaborative, Interlex Communications, San Antonio Business Group on Health, San Antonio Independent School District, San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, Southside Independent School District, South Texas Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics,

Tiny Roar Creative, University Health System, University of Texas Institute for Health Promotion Research, Witte Museum and YMCA of Greater San Antonio.