- Sugar substitutes

# Diet soda may increase appetite

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Bad news for people who swear by "diet" sodas to cut calories, reports NPR.org: A new study suggests that the drinks may actually increase food cravings for some people. The researchers recruited 74 volunteers who, after a 12-hour fast the day before, were asked to drink water sweetened either with natural sugar, sucralose—an artificial sweetener often used in diet sodas—or nothing at all. The volunteers underwent blood tests and MRI scans to record signs of unconscious hunger. Two hours after the water, the volunteers were taken to a buffet, where they could eat what they wanted. The researchers found that after consuming sucralose, women and obese people had "greater brain reward activity"—cravings, in other words. These groups also showed lower levels of hormones that inhibit appetite, and they ate more at the buffet. In contrast, men and people in a healthy weight range showed increases in neither brain reward activity nor hunger response. "What was most surprising was the impact of body weight and biological sex," says study author Katie Page, from the University of Southern California. It's unclear why sucralose might increase appetite. It's could be that artificial sweeteners confuse the body by making it think a real sugar hit is coming, throwing off its ability to efficiently metabolize sugar that's consumed later.