

# Nutrition according to the Cato Institute

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It's not surprising that the Cato Institute — a think tank devoted to libertarian principles — is complaining about San Francisco's new policy banning Coke, Pepsi and other sugar-sweetened beverages from vending machines on city property. Cato writers are fond of throwing around terms like "food police" and "nanny state" to impugn the efforts of public health officials to, well, improve public health.

The vending machine prohibition applies to soda, sports drinks, flavored waters, fruit punch or anything else with [added sugar](#). Instead, machines may be stocked with water, milk (of the cow, soy or rice variety), 100% fruit juice or diet soda. San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom ordered the switch in April, though thirsty San Franciscans are just starting to notice it now, according to the [San Francisco Chronicle](#).

In issuing his executive order, Newsom cited various studies showing how soda is fueling the rise in obesity, especially among children. The [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#) calls soda "liquid candy."

Cato research fellow Jason Kuznicki [weighed in](#) last week on the institute's Cato@Liberty website. He told readers that it should be up to them to decide whether to drink Diet Coke, Coke Zero, or old-school Coca-Cola:

"Part of being free is being free to make bad choices, to take risks, and to bear the consequences," he wrote. "Part of being free is that you, personally, may decide what you eat or drink."

That's a worthy argument. (He even acknowledged that society as a whole bears some of the consequences of individual's bad food choices by picking up the tab for obesity-related health costs, which were [\\$75 billion in 2003](#).)

Far less persuasive was Kuznicki's assertion that soda is actually less fattening than so-called healthy alternatives.

A 12-ounce can of classic Coke contains 140 calories. The equivalent amount of whole milk contains 216 calories, he wrote, while soy milk has 198. Both contain fat, unlike soda. Even 12 ounces of nonfat milk will set you back 124.5 calories, he wrote.

Whatever weight you might gain drinking Coke, "you'll be even fatter if you substitute whole milk," he wrote, adding that "the extra nutrients in milk don't do anything to make it less fattening."

Does Kuznicki (or anyone else) really think that the goal of a healthy diet is simply to minimize the total number of calories consumed? (Perhaps these are the same folks who swear by [Taco Bell's Drive-Thru Diet](#).)

A 12-ounce serving of [whole milk](#) contains 12 grams of protein, along with 45% of the calcium and 36% of the vitamin D you need each day. The same amount of [soy milk](#) also has 12 grams of protein and 14% of the daily recommended intake of iron.

Care to guess how many vitamins and minerals are in a can of Coke? If you guessed anything other than a big fat zero, [click here](#).