

# HEALTHY DRINKS. HEALTHY KIDS.

## Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood

Recommendations from Key National Health  
and Nutrition Organizations

### low-calorie sweetened beverages

#### Healthy Drinks, Healthy Kids

Research shows that what children drink – from birth through age 5 – can have a big impact on their health. That’s why some of the nation’s leading experts on health and nutrition developed recommendations to help parents and caregivers choose what’s best for kids. The full recommendations can be found at [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](https://HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org). This brief provides more details about *low-calorie sweetened beverages*.

### What are low-calorie sweetened beverages?

These are beverages with no- or reduced-calorie sweeteners that are used as sugar substitutes or sugar alternatives and are significantly sweeter than regular sugar. These beverages are commonly called “diet,” “light,” or “sugar-free” beverages. Specific examples of these beverages and how to identify them while shopping for your child are provided below.

#### Other common names for low-calorie sweeteners include:

- “Non-nutritive sweeteners”
- “Artificial sweeteners”
- “Sugar substitutes”
- “Sugar alternatives”
- “High-intensity sweeteners”

### So, what do experts recommend about low-calorie sweetened beverages?



### What do I need to know about low-calorie sweetened beverages for young kids?

1. Low-calorie sweeteners are 100 – 20,000 times sweeter than sugar.<sup>1</sup>
2. Low-calorie sweetened beverages are not recommended for toddlers and young kids
3. Beverages with added sugar (sugar-sweetened beverages) should not be replaced with beverages with low-calorie sweeteners. Instead, stick with plain water, milk, and maybe a little bit of 100% juice.

### Why aren't these beverages recommended for young children?

Little bodies are going through major mental and physical developments, and we now have more evidence than ever that what happens early in a child’s life affects his or her health later on. However, there is not enough research yet for us to determine the long-term health impact of drinking low-calorie sweetened beverages during early childhood. Among adults, there is evidence that long-term use of low-calorie sweeteners can increase risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Low-Calorie Sweeteners. The Nutrition Source. Updated April 2023. Accessed June 2, 2023. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-drinks/artificial-sweeteners/>.

<sup>2</sup> Use of non-sugar sweeteners: WHO guideline. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

## How do I know if my child’s beverage has low-calorie sweeteners?

Read the Ingredients list, which is often found below or next to the “Nutrition Facts” label. The ingredients are listed in order from the largest to smallest quantity. That is, the ingredients that make up most of the beverage are listed first, and the least used ingredients are listed last.

There are 8 types of low-calorie sweeteners. You can identify LCS by looking for these terms (brand names) in the ingredients list :

- Acesulfame potassium (Sunett®, Sweet One®)
- Advantame
- Aspartame (Equal®, NutraSweet®, Sugar Twin®)
- Monk fruit
- Neotame (Newtame®)
- Saccharin (Sweet’N Low®, Sweet Twin®, Necta Sweet®)
- Stevia
- Sucralose (Splenda®)



This drink is advertised as having “half the sugar” but it is sweetened with monk fruit.

**INGREDIENTS: FILTERED WATER, SUGAR, PEAR AND STRAWBERRY JUICE CONCENTRATES, MONK FRUIT CONCENTRATE, CITRIC ACID, APPLE JUICE CONCENTRATE, NATURAL FLAVOR, MUSHROOM EXTRACT (TO PROTECT QUALITY).**



This package says “zero sugar” but this drink contains aspartame and acesulfame potassium!

**INGREDIENTS: PURE FILTERED WATER, LEMON JUICE FROM CONCENTRATE\*\*, LESS THAN 0.5% OF: NATURAL FLAVORS, CITRIC ACID (PROVIDES TARTNESS), VITAMIN C (ASCORBIC ACID), POTASSIUM CITRATE (REGULATES TARTNESS), GLYCEROL ESTER OF ROSIN, MODIFIED CORNSTARCH, ASPARTAME, ACESULFAME POTASSIUM. \*\*ADDS A NEGLIGIBLE AMOUNT OF SUGAR.**



This package says “no sugar added” but this drink contains stevia!

**INGREDIENTS: WATER, ORGANIC APPLE JUICE CONCENTRATE, ORGANIC NATURAL FLAVORS, CITRIC ACID, ORGANIC STEVIA EXTRACT (REBAUDIOSIDE A).**

## Thirsty for more?

Visit [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](http://HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org) to find more information on other drinks such as:

- Water
- Milk
- Juice
- Plant-Based, Non-Dairy Milk
- Toddler Milk
- Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

**Healthy Eating Research**

*These recommendations were developed by experts at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), and the American Heart Association (AHA) under the leadership of Healthy Eating Research (HER) with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*