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. 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.

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

![chart showing recommendations for 0-6 months, 6-12 months, 1-3 years, and 4-5 years]

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.¹
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.²

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.

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

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

Thirsty for more?

Visit HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org to find more information on other drinks such as:

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

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.