

Comparison of Beverage Recommendations for Young Children: Opportunities for Alignment in U.S. Policy Guidance

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Research shows that what young children drink—from birth through age 5—can have a big impact on their health. Yet, current consumption data demonstrates that kids are drinking too many sugary drinks, which can increase a child’s risk for obesity, diabetes, and other health problems. That’s why Healthy Eating Research (HER), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, partnered with experts from national health and nutrition organizations—the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, and the American Heart Association—to develop new recommendations on what children ages 0 to 5 should drink as part of a healthy diet. The resulting [consensus statement](#) was released in September 2019, along with a technical report outlining the scientific evidence and a suite of consumer-facing materials at HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org. Having one set of uniform recommendations provided by health professionals is a key step towards getting U.S. children on a path to drinking healthier beverages.

In addition to the HER consensus beverage recommendations, there are a number of guidelines and recommendations set forth by the Federal government on beverage consumption for young children including the 1) [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) (DGA) 2020-2025, 2) [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children](#) (WIC), and 3) [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) (CACFP). A [comparison](#) of the HER consensus beverage recommendations with the DGA recommendations, and WIC and CACFP policy guidance showed:

- Most of the guidance is in full alignment or is consistent in its perceived intent, though not necessarily in the exact wording with the beverage consensus recommendations.
- For the CACFP and WIC programs, areas of misalignment exist due to the lack of federal regulations for a particular beverage or age group.
- Some sources do not provide guidance on certain beverages and groups.
- The largest source of misalignment is for flavored milk in the WIC program for the 1- to 4-year-old age range.

The following tables identify the areas of misalignment (between the consensus beverage recommendations and DGA, WIC, CACFP) and key opportunities for better alignment in U.S. policy guidance. To improve young children’s beverage consumption habits, guidance at the Federal level needs to be consistent and based on the most recent evidence available. Further, nutrition education efforts also need to be aligned to ensure parents and caregivers don’t receive conflicting information from the various providers who care for their children (pediatricians, pediatric dentists, child care providers, registered dietitians, etc.)

Tools & Resources:

HER has created helpful resources for parents and caregivers and health care providers on beverages for young children, including:

- Fact Sheets on [Water](#), [Milk](#), [Juice](#), [Toddler Milk](#), and [other beverages](#).
- Plant-Based Milk decision tools for [parents](#) and [health care providers](#).
- [Provider Toolkit](#) which includes messaging about health beverages and a library of resources for health care providers.

Find more resources at HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org

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HEALTHY KIDS.

Key References:

Healthy Eating Research (HER)

- [Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood: Recommendations from Key National Health and Nutrition Organizations](#)
- [Feeding Guidelines for Infants and Young Toddlers: A Responsive Parenting Approach](#)
- [Comparison of Beverage Recommendations for Young Children](#)

Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA)

- [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025](#)

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

- [Nutrition Standards for CACFP Meals and Snacks](#)
- [Offering Water in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)
- [7 CFR 226.20 Requirements for meals](#)
- [Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP](#)

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- [WIC Food Packages - Maximum Monthly Allowances](#)
- [WIC Food Packages - Regulatory Requirements for WIC-Eligible Foods](#)
- [7 CFR Part 246 Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children](#)

Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) 2020-2025

	Misalignment	HER Recommendations for 2025 - 2030 DGA
Plain Drinking Water	For toddlers and children 12 months to five years, the DGA does not specify recommended quantitative amounts.	For toddlers and children 12 months to five years, provide guidance on quantitative amounts of water per day (i.e., infants 6 - 12 months should consume 0.5-1 cup of water/day; children 1 - 5 years should consume 1-4 cups/ day).
Plain Pasteurized Milk	For toddlers 12 - 24 months, the DGA recommended daily cup equivalents per day (1.67 - 2 cups) of dairy is lower than the HER recommendation of 2 - 3 cups of milk per day.	For toddlers 12 - 24 months, increase the recommended range of daily cup equivalents of dairy to be consumed to 2-3 cup equivalent per day.
Plant-Based/ Non-Dairy Beverages	<p>For toddlers 12 - 24 months, the DGA allows unsweetened varieties to be consumed in small amounts with the caveat that only soy beverages are a dairy equivalent.</p> <p>For children 2 - 5 years, plant-based/non-dairy beverages are not specifically addressed in the recommendations.</p>	For toddlers and children 12 months to five years, clearly state that most plant-based/non-dairy beverages are not an appropriate substitute for cow’s milk. Additional guidance should be provided to identify alternatives that are nutritionally equivalent to milk (e.g., soy milk, pea protein blends) and to assist families who may have medical or dietary reasons for not consuming cow’s milk to encourage choosing an option that meets the child’s nutritional needs, especially for key nutrients typically found in cow’s milk. Further, a recommendation to consult with the child’s pediatrician or a registered dietitian should be highly considered.
Flavored Milk	For children 2 - 5 years, the DGA does not explicitly recommend against the consumption.	For children 2 - 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of flavored milk is not recommended.
Toddler Milk	For children 2 - 5 years, the DGA does not address toddler milk consumption.	For children 2 - 5 years, explicitly state that the consumption of toddler milk is not recommended even in the case of picky eating.
Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSB)	For children 2 - 5 years, the DGA does not recommend against consumption of SSBs. Rather, suggests these beverages are “not necessary in the child or adolescent diet.”	For children 2 - 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of SSBs is not recommended.
Beverages with Low-Calorie Sweeteners	For children 2 - 5 years, the DGA does not address consumption of beverages with low-calorie sweeteners.	For children 2 - 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of beverages with low-calorie sweeteners is not recommended.
Caffeinated Beverages	For children 2 - 5 years, the DGA does not address consumption of caffeinated beverages.	For children 2 - 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of caffeinated beverages is not recommended.



Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

	Misalignment	HER Recommendations for WIC Federal Regulations
Plain Drinking Water	For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on consumption of plain drinking water. Nutrition education/counseling does address plain drinking water; however, quantitative guidance is not provided.	<p>Nutrition education/counseling should include guidance on introducing small amounts of plain water once solid food is introduced (typically around 6 months of age).</p> <p>For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance on daily quantitative amounts of plain drinking water to be consumed (i.e., infants 6 - 12 months consume 0.5-1 cup of water per day; children 1 - 5 years consume 1-4 cups per day).</p>
Plain Pasteurized Milk	<p>For infants 0 - 12 months, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on consumption of plain milk.</p> <p>For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years, Federal regulations do not specify maximum quantitative amounts per day.</p>	<p>For infants 0 - 12 months, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance against consumption of plain milk.</p> <p>Consistent with the recommendation to reduce the monthly milk allowance in USDA's Proposed Rule, (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages (Nov 2022)) nutrition counseling for toddlers and children 1 - 4 years should educate on maximum quantitative amounts of milk per day (i.e., milk consumption should not exceed 3 cups/day for children ages 12 - 24 months, 2 cups/day for children ages 2 - 3 years, and 2.5 cups/day for children ages 4 - 5 years).</p>
100% Juice	<p>For infants 0 - 12 months, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on consumption of 100% juice.</p> <p>For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on maximum quantitative amounts per day.</p>	<p>For infants 0 - 12 months, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance against consumption of 100% juice</p> <p>Consistent with the recommendation to reduce the monthly juice allowance in USDA's Proposed Rule, nutrition counseling for toddlers and children 1 - 4 years should educate on maximum quantitative amounts of juice per day (i.e., children 1 - 3 years old should not exceed 4 ounces/day; children 4 - 5 years old should not exceed 4-6 ounces/day).</p>
Plant-Based/ Non-Dairy Beverages	<p>For infants 0 - 12 months, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on consumption of plant-based/non-dairy beverages.</p> <p>For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years, Federal regulations allow flavored and/or sweetened varieties of soy beverages.</p>	<p>For infants 0 - 12 months, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance against consumption of plant-based/non-dairy beverages.</p> <p>For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years who may have medical or dietary reasons for not consuming cow's milk, nutrition education should be provided to assist families in choosing an option that meets the child's nutritional needs, especially for key nutrients typically found in cow's milk.</p> <p>Consistent with the recommendation to limit the amount of sugar allowed in soy beverages in USDA's Proposed Rule, Federal regulations should limit the amount of added sugar in soy beverages to <u>no more than 10%</u> of daily calories.</p>
Flavored Milk	For toddlers and children 1 - 4 years, Federal regulations provide authority to WIC state agencies to decide whether to allow flavored milk as part of the food package.	<p>For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance against consumption of flavored milk.</p> <p>Consistent with the USDA Proposed Rule, flavored milk should not be allowable in the food package to reduce consumption of added sugars. Remove the federal regulation providing authority to WIC state agencies to decide whether to allow flavored milk for young children 1 - 4 years.</p>
Beverages with Low-Calorie Sweeteners	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance against the consumption of beverages with low-calorie sweeteners.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance against consumption of beverages with low-calorie sweeteners.
Caffeinated Beverages	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance against the consumption of caffeinated beverages.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, nutrition education/counseling should include guidance against consumption of caffeinated beverages.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

	Misalignment	HER Recommendations for CACFP Federal Regulations
Breastfeeding/ Infant Formula	For toddlers and children 1 - 5 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on breastfeeding.	Support breast milk as an option for children that continue to breastfeed beyond 12 months.
Plain Drinking Water	For infants 0 - 12 months, Federal regulations do not provide guidance on consumption of plain drinking water.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, provide guidance on quantitative amounts of water recommended per day (i.e., infants 6 - 12 months should consume 0.5-1 cup of water/day; children 1 to 5 years should consume 1-4 cups per day).
	For infants and young children 6 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not specify recommended quantitative amounts.	
Plain Pasteurized Milk	For toddlers and children 1 - 5 years, Federal regulations do not specify maximum quantitative amounts per day.	For toddlers and children 1 to 5 years, provide guidance on maximum quantitative amounts of milk per day (i.e., milk consumption should not exceed 3 cups/day for children ages 12 - 24 months, 2 cups/day for children ages 2 - 3 years, and 2.5 cups/day for children ages 4 - 5 years).
100% Juice	For toddlers and children 1 - 5 years, Federal regulations allow 100% juice to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at one meal, including snack, per day. Federal regulations do not provide guidance on maximum quantitative amounts per day.	For toddlers and children 1 to 5 years, allow only whole fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned) to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at all meals and snacks. If 100% juice is allowed as a substitute, it should only be allowed for one meal or snack (not both) per day and must adhere to the daily maximum quantitative amount (i.e., children 1 - 3 years should not exceed 4 ounces/day; children 4 - 5 years should not exceed 4-6 ounces/day).
Toddler Milk	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not address toddler milk consumption.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, explicitly state that the consumption of toddler milk is not recommended even in the case of picky eating.
Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSB)	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance against the consumption of SSBs.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of SSBs is not recommended.
Beverages with Low-Calorie Sweeteners	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance against the consumption of beverages with low-calorie sweeteners.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of Beverages with Low-Calorie Sweeteners is not recommended.
Caffeinated Beverages	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, Federal regulations do not provide guidance against the consumption of caffeinated beverages.	For infants and young children 0 months to 5 years, explicitly state that consumption of caffeinated beverages is not recommended.

