

HEALTHY DRINKS. HEALTHY KIDS.

Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood

Recommendations from Key National Health
and Nutrition Organizations

sugar-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. This brief provides more details about *sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)*.

What are sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)?

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are drinks to which any forms of sugar are added. Here are some examples: regular soda/soft drinks, fruit drinks and fruit-flavored drinks, fruit punch, fruit or juice cocktail, fruit-ades (e.g., lemonade, limeade), juice drinks, jugos naturales or homemade juices that are made with sugars (e.g., table sugar, syrup, honey, nectar, or agave), hot chocolate/cocoa, ciders, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened flavored waters, and sweetened coffee and tea beverages.

SSBs do not include beverages sweetened with low-calorie sweeteners (such as stevia or sucralose), 100% juice, or flavored milks. There are different recommendations from experts about these beverages, which can be found at HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org.

So, what do experts recommend about sugar-sweetened beverages?



Why aren't these drinks recommended for young children?

Research shows strong evidence of negative health effects from SSBs. Drinks with added sugars offer little to no nutritional benefits, often take the place of healthier foods and drinks in a person’s diet, and don’t make you feel full. Drinking SSBs in early childhood is linked to less healthy diets, weight gain and obesity, dental cavities, and development of unhealthy taste preferences, which can have adverse health effects over a person’s lifetime.

Research shows that two to five year-olds get more added sugars than is recommended, and SSBs – specifically fruit juice drinks and fruit-flavored drinks – are a leading source of added sugars in their diets. It’s best for kids under age two to avoid added sugars. Kids ages two to five should limit added sugars to less than 10 percent of their total daily calories, which is about six teaspoons of sugar per day.

Remember that young children are still developing eating habits, and they’ll likely carry these habits into older ages. If a child is already drinking these beverages, cutting back will probably work best if done gradually.

Did you know?

- Fruit-flavored drinks are the most common SSBs that young children (ages six months to four years) drink.
- Two to five year-old children who drink sweetened beverages (such as soft drinks, fruit drinks, and sports/energy drinks) on any given day take in nine fluid ounces of these beverages, on average. That adds up to more than 25 gallons per year!

Thirsty for more? Visit HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org

How do I know if a drink is an SSB?

Check the ingredients list on the container for added sugars. Some common names for these sugars include raw sugar, brown sugar, coconut sugar, cane sugar or cane syrup, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, sucrose, fructose, glucose, maltose, lactose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, agave, malt syrup, molasses, or fruit juice concentrates. Starting in the year 2020, the Nutrition Facts label on most food and drink products will list the amount of added sugars per serving.

If there is at least one added sugar in the ingredients list, it's an SSB.

Aren't juice drinks and fruit drinks healthy?

Even though drinks with "fruit" or "juice" in the name may sound healthy, many juice drinks and fruit drinks are mostly water and sugar. Fruit-flavored drinks can have as much sugar as a soft drink! The added sugars and extra calories in these products outweigh any added nutrients they may have.

If it's okay for kids over age two to have a little added sugar, why shouldn't they have sugary drinks?

Young children get added sugars from a variety of other foods in their diets. SSBs have few (if any) other nutrients and can contribute to kids consuming too many added sugars and calories. When including added sugars in young children's diets, choose wisely. Use them to enhance the taste of healthy foods, like adding a little brown sugar to a sweet potato or oatmeal, or a bit of honey to plain yogurt with sliced fruit.

Pro-tips: Helping little ones cut back on SSBs

- It's best to start with plain water before introducing sweeter drinks. This helps kids develop healthy habits.
- You can help your child enjoy water by adding pieces of fresh fruit to improve the taste. Let your child pick a favorite fruit! You can also add a silly straw to a special cup or water bottle that your child likes. Reserve this cup for plain water only. It's amazing how something so simple can be such a big motivator for young kids!
- "Fizzy" waters can be a fun alternative to SSBs, too. Not all carbonated drinks are SSBs. Examples of carbonated drinks that do not typically have added sugars are seltzer water or sparkling water.
- Parent modeling of healthy behaviors can have a big impact on young children's habits. When our little ones see adults and older kids drinking plain water, it will likely have an impact on their choices, too!

Remember, plain water is the best option to quench kids' thirst from ages one through five!

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
- Low-Calorie 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.