

Healthy Beverages for Children

It is important for children to stay hydrated, and in order to do this they need to drink fluids throughout the day. With the wide variety of beverages available and marketed towards young people, it can be difficult to make a healthy choice. Below are some commonly asked questions about beverages, and answers backed by evidence to help you make the best choice for children in your care.

Question: What is the healthiest beverage out there?

Answer: Water!

- Tap water is safe, inexpensive and the number one healthiest choice for everyone, including children. It is an excellent choice to stay hydrated without consuming extra calories or sugar which can lead to weight gain and tooth decay.
- Children need to drink more in hot weather or with increased physical activity, especially if they are sweating. Encourage children to drink more water to stay hydrated in hot or active situations.
- Drinking water between meals is important as children need to focus on eating their meals and drinking other beverages such as milk/milk substitutes during meals. As a teacher, incorporating regular water breaks throughout the day will teach children the importance of drinking water while creating lasting routines for them.



How can I encourage children to drink more water?

- Make it fun with a funky glass or water bottle- everyone can have their own style!
- Add natural flavor- slices of lemon, orange, strawberries, or cucumber can add flavor and vitamins to an ordinary glass of water.
- Make it a routine- before and after breaks or physical activity, have children stop by a water fountain for a drink. Try counting to 3 for those who need encouragement.



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Question: Is chocolate/flavored milk (or milk alternatives) as nutritious as regular milk (or milk alternatives)?

Answer: NO- chocolate/flavored milk (or milk alternatives) contain significantly more sugar than regular milk/milk alternatives.

Chocolate/flavored milk contains more sugar than white milk. Although it provides the same nutrients as white milk, it should only be consumed in moderation. The same applies to flavoured fortified soy beverages. A good idea is to mix white milk and chocolate milk together to lower the sugar content.



Why is milk/milk alternatives a good choice?

- Milk is an excellent source of calcium, good source of vitamin D, protein, potassium, vitamin B12, riboflavin and phosphorus
- All milk (Homogenized, 2%, 1%, skim) has the same amount of nutrients (ie calcium, vitamin D), the only difference is the fat content.
- A fortified soy beverage contains the same nutrients as milk.
- If the soy beverage is not fortified with calcium and vitamin D, then it is not considered a milk replacement.
- Other alternative beverages include almond milk or rice milk. There are also fortified and non-fortified versions of these. Choose the fortified versions to ensure adequate calcium and vitamin D intake.

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Question: Is 100% fruit juice a healthy choice for children?

Answer: Only in small amounts- and the whole fruit is healthier than the juice.

It is true that 100% fruit juice is more nutritious than artificial fruit beverages, however 100% fruit juice still contains high amounts of sugar and it is easy to drink too much. Although sugar in 100% fruit juice is naturally occurring, it is still recommended to limit fruit juice and encourage consumption of whole fruits and vegetables as they contain fibre and are more satisfying. Too much sugar can lead to tooth decay and excess intake of calories, neither of which is good for children.



- Canada's Food Guide suggests children have no more than one ½ cup serving of 100% fruit juice per day
- Try mixing half juice and half water- this will encourage children to drink more fluid while taking in less sugar and calories

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Question: When do children need sports drinks?

Answer: Never!



- You NEVER NEED a sports drink- water and good, nutritious food will do the trick to keep your body hydrated and fueled
- If you do choose to use sports drinks, they should only be used under the following conditions (Dietitians of Canada, 2013):
 - only if you are doing intense exercise for longer than one hour
 - ex. running, swimming, some team sports that require you to keep your heart rate elevated for more than one hour
 - or if you are sweating...A LOT!
 - more than 1 L per hour
 - if it is very hot in the environment you are exercising in
 - if you are wearing lots of protective clothing that makes you sweat, as in hockey or football, AND you are actually sweating
- If you drink sports drinks when you don't need one, you are consuming extra sugar, salt and calories that you don't need which can lead to weight gain and tooth decay
- Your body is very good at regulating itself internally to make sure you are exercising safely. A recent (2014) Marketplace investigation that teamed up with Canadian Olympians Clara Hughes and Simon Whitfield, discovered that it would take an elite triathlete two hours of strenuous activity before they would benefit from the electrolytes in a sports drink. Unless you are working out harder than an Olympic athlete, you don't need them either!

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Reference:

Dietitians of Canada. (2013). Sports drinks: their role in hydration for athletic performance. Retrieved from: <http://www.dietitians.ca/Nutrition-Resources-A-Z/Factsheets/Sports-Nutrition/Sports-Drinks.aspx>