Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

Sugar-sweetened beverages are everywhere—and most have at least 4 teaspoons of sugar per serving. Too much sugar isn't good for a child's health, and the calories in sugar-sweetened beverages can add up quickly. Sugar-sweetened beverages include soft drinks, fruit drinks (such as punch and lemonade), sports and energy drinks, sweetened milk and specialty coffee or tea drinks. When sugar-sweetened beverages replace healthier food choices, such as fruits and vegetables, kids may be missing out on important nutrients that help them grow and be healthy. Many organizations in Canada, such as Diabetes Canada, recommend that Canadians limit intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and drink water in its place.

Children need water to stay hydrated and healthy. Severe dehydration can cause serious health problems, but even mild dehydration can impact a child's alertness and energy level. Water has no additives, caffeine or sugar—it's the best choice.

Kids who drink more sugar-sweetened beverages are more likely to have cavities and other dental problems. Instead, kids should drink tap water. Most large municipalities, such as Hamilton, Ontario, add fluoride to tap water to help keep teeth strong and prevent tooth decay. Tap water needs to meet very strict safety standards and is tested regularly to ensure it's safe to drink.

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that kids avoid sports drinks and beverages with caffeine. Sports drinks are designed to help rehydrate after sports. For most kids, water is best to rehydrate after routine physical activity. Drinks with caffeine, such as some pop, iced coffee, and energy drinks, can disrupt children's sleep, cause headaches and upset stomachs.
Why to Avoid Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

Sugar-sweetened beverages contain sugar and calories that can lead to weight gain and increase a child's risk of becoming overweight or obese. When children consume sugar-sweetened beverages, they don't feel as full as if they ate that same number of calories as food. Since they don't feel full, kids don't compensate by eating less calories at meal time.

Some drinks, such as 100% fruit juice, have vitamins and nutrients and do not contain added sugars or syrups. They should still be limited or avoided. Fruits or vegetables are a better choice as they contain fibre and make kids feel more full.

Strategies to Reduce or Eliminate Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

• Encourage kids to drink water when thirsty.
• Make water the easy choice.
  • Carry a full re-usable water bottle to school, sports and outings.
  • Offer water at family meals.
  • Be a water role model--drink water in front of your kids.
• Health Canada encourages mothers to exclusively breastfeed until babies are 6 months old. Most babies fed this way do not need additional water.
• Offer plain, unsweetened milk (skim, 1% or 2%), not sweetened milk.
• If your child has an allergy or intolerance to milk, offer an alternative like unsweetened, fortified soy milk.
• Avoid or limit serving sugar-sweetened beverages at children's parties and events.
• Encourage your child's daycare or preschool to avoid serving juice or other sweetened beverages at meals.
• If serving 100% fruit juice, dilute it 50/50 with water.

Most flavoured drinks, even 100% fruit juice, have sugar in them. Always offer water when kids are thirsty. More information is available at: [http://waterdoeswonders.ca](http://waterdoeswonders.ca)

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References

Diabetes Canada. Diabetes Canada's Position on Sugars; Freeman R. Moderate evidence support a relationship between sugar intake and dental caries; Healthy Kids Community Challenge. Water Does Wonders website; Canadian Paediatric Society's Position statement on energy and sports drinks in children and adolescents; Ruyter et al. A trial of sugar-free or sugar-sweetened beverages and body weight in children.

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