

Healthy Eating: Too Many Sugary Drinks?



What drinks do you choose most often?

If you often reach for soft drinks, juice, or sports drinks when you're thirsty or are eating a meal, you're probably getting too much sugar. Sweetened drinks contain added sugars and syrups.

Added sugars are empty calories, which means they don't provide the nutrition you get from naturally occurring sugars in foods like milk and fruits.

One 12-ounce soft drink, for example, has 8 teaspoons of sugar and about 140 calories. Juice drinks often have little fruit juice but lots of sugar. And sports drinks have sugar and sodium that you only need if you're exercising for a long time and sweating a lot.

Which drinks are better?

For adults, water, unsweetened herbal teas, and nonfat or 1% milk are good choices. If you want more flavor than tap or bottled water, add a slice of lemon or lime. Or try a naturally flavored sparkling mineral water. Check the label to make sure no sugar is added. Avoid vitamin-fortified waters that contain added sugars.

Diet soft drinks don't have any calories, so they are a better choice than regular soft drinks. But compared with milk, which gives you nutrients, diet drinks are not the best choice. Limit how many diet drinks you have, and choose water or milk instead.

In hot weather, drink plenty of water before, during, and after activity. This helps to prevent dehydration and heat-related illness. Water is all you need if you are exercising for less than an hour.

For longer exercise periods, a sports drink is okay because your body uses the sugar in the drink as fuel and uses the sodium to replace what you lose from sweating.

Drinks for kids

At mealtime, serve whole milk to children between the ages of 1 and 2. The essential fatty acids in whole milk are needed for brain growth and development.

Give fat-free or low-fat milk to children over the age of 2. Children under 12 months should not drink cow's milk.

At other times of the day, give kids water to quench thirst. You can encourage your child to drink more water and fewer sugar-sweetened drinks by keeping cold water on hand in the refrigerator.

Limit fruit juice to 4 to 6 fl oz a day. Check juice labels, and choose drinks that are 100% fruit juice.

Some drinks sold as juice are mostly water and sugar. Even in drinks that are high in juice, fruit juice does not have the valuable fiber that whole fruit has.

Be sure to read labels

Added sugars have many names:

- Corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, and corn sweetener
- Honey
- Molasses
- Dextrose
- Fructose
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Glucose
- Turbinado, brown, raw, or invert sugar
- Lactose
- Malt syrup
- Sucrose
- Maltose

Questions to ask your doctor

List your questions or concerns below. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about drinks: