



# Sugar-Sweetened Beverages\* and Young Children

**Young children drink an enormous amount of sugar.** National survey data indicate that every day, 66% of children ages 2–11 years old consume sugar-sweetened beverages.<sup>1</sup> Sugar-sweetened beverages provide an average of 69 daily calories for children ages 2–5 and 118 daily calories for children ages 6–11.<sup>2</sup> Among 2–5 year olds, African-American children consume nearly twice as many calories from sugar-sweetened beverages as white children.<sup>2</sup>

**Sugar-sweetened beverages are a major contributor to childhood obesity.** Compared to children who rarely drink sugar-sweetened beverages, children who drink at least one serving of sugar-sweetened beverages per day have 55% increased odds of being overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup> Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption in childhood also increases the risk for overweight and obesity in adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

**Sugar-sweetened beverages displace healthier items from a young child's diet.** Young children who consume a lot of sugar have a poorer overall diet quality<sup>5</sup> because these empty calories replace healthier foods that provide essential nutrients like calcium, iron, and vitamin A.<sup>6,7</sup> For instance, soda consumption is associated with lower intake of milk and fruit.<sup>8</sup>

**Children drink more sugar-sweetened beverages and less milk today than they did in previous decades.** In the 1970s, children drank nearly three times more milk than sugar-sweetened beverages.<sup>9</sup> Today, they consume these beverages in equal amounts.<sup>9</sup> Because milk provides essential nutrients for bone development, replacing milk with soda can reduce bone mass and increase the risk for osteoporosis later in life.<sup>10</sup>

**Sugar-sweetened beverages damage children's teeth.** Soda consumption nearly doubles the risk of dental caries in children.<sup>11</sup> The acid in soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages causes erosion of tooth enamel, often after just one sip, and the sugar in these beverages provide fuel for the bacteria that cause tooth decay.<sup>12</sup> Because diet beverages also contain acid, they too increase the risk for cavities.<sup>12</sup>

**Sugar-sweetened beverages often contain caffeine.** Sixty percent of sodas sold in the United States contain caffeine.<sup>13</sup> Children who consume the amount of caffeine in one 20-oz. soda can experience withdrawal symptoms like headaches and anxiety if they stop drinking soda.<sup>14</sup>

**Breast milk is best under age one; whole milk or water from 1–2 years; low-fat or nonfat milk and water past age 2.** Experts agree that for children under the age of one, breast milk is best.<sup>15</sup> If breast milk is not provided, then infant formula is the best alternative during the first year. From ages 1–2, children should drink whole milk and water. And once children are past the age of two, they should drink low-fat or nonfat milk and water.<sup>16</sup>

*\* NOTE: Sugar-sweetened beverages refers to all beverages with added sugars including carbonated soft drinks, juice drinks, sports drinks, flavored and enhanced waters, sweetened teas and energy drinks.*



**Children should not drink more than one small serving of 100% fruit juice per day.** Fruit juice has a high concentration of sugar and calories and lacks some of the nutrients and other benefits of whole fruit.<sup>16</sup> It is always best to offer children fresh whole fruit instead of juice. Infants under six months old should not drink juice at all, and children ages 1 to 6 should not drink more than 6 ounces of juice per day.<sup>16</sup> When children do drink juice, it should be 100% juice, not sugar-sweetened juice drinks.<sup>16</sup>

**Diet beverages are not a healthy alternative for children.** Diet sodas are detrimental to dental health, may contain caffeine, and their long-term effects are still unknown for children.<sup>17,18</sup>

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