



Are our kids drinking too many soft drinks?

Population data from the USDA indicates that there is a rapid increase of intake of carbonated soft drinks at age 8. The average intake of carbonated soft drinks is 4½ fl. oz. per day for 4-8 year olds. That amount increases to 18 fl. oz. per day for 14-18 years olds.

In 1996, U.S. adolescents (ages 11-18) were drinking less milk and more soft drinks and other sweetened beverages compared to 1965. Per capita milk consumption has been reduced from 5 to 3 cups per day for adolescent males and from 3½ to 2 cups per day for adolescent females.

Average caloric soft drink intake has increased more than two times in the past three decades. For adolescent males, soft drink consumption has increased from 1½ to nearly 4½ cups per day. For adolescent females, soft drink consumption has increased from 1⅓ to 2¾ cups per day.

Excessive use of soft drinks, sports drinks and sweetened drinks can influence children's bone health. Youth with calcium intakes below recommended amounts may not achieve peak bone mass, increasing the risk of osteoporosis later in life.

Likewise, excessive use of sweetened beverages, rather than milk, may promote the development of obesity. Sweetened beverages may lead to an excessive consumption of calories.

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The body tries to maintain body weight so that if we overeat for a meal we tend to under-eat later to compensate. However, the body may not recognize the extra calories when they are consumed as sweetened liquids.

Data indicates that calcium and dairy foods may help regulate fat balance and body weight. Reduced consumption of calcium may alter the balance between fat synthesis and breakdown in fat cells of the body, favoring fat synthesis.

Recommendations for beverage consumption for children

1. Offer only milk or water with meals both at home and when eating out.
2. Offer sweetened beverages only on an occasional basis.
3. Follow the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations for 100 percent fruit juice:
(1) Do not introduce fruit juice until at least 6 months of age; (2) no more than 1 serving or 4-6 oz. of fruit juice per day for children 1-6 years of age; and (3) no more than 2 servings or 8-12 oz. of juice per day for children 7-18 years of age.
Or alternately, offer whole fruit rather than juice to provide more fiber.

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