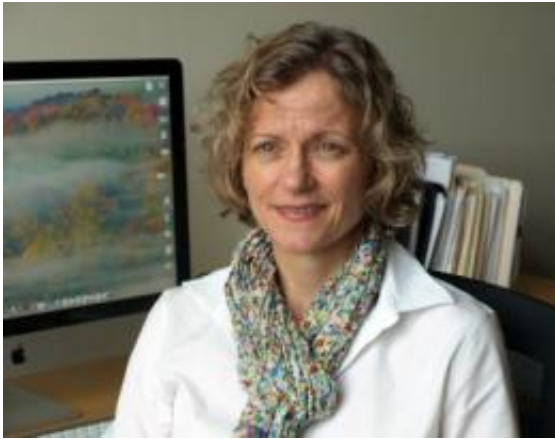


Begin early: Researchers say water with meals may encourage wiser choices

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T. Bettina Cornwell of the University of Oregon has found that young children consumed more vegetables when served with water instead of a sweetened beverage. The research suggests food-pairing choices begin early. Credit: University of Oregon

Water could change the way we eat. That's the conclusion of new research by T. Bettina Cornwell of the University of Oregon and Anna R. McAlister of Michigan State University. Their findings appear online this week ahead of regular publication by the journal *Appetite*.

The paper featured separate studies. One involved a survey of 60 young U.S. adults (ages 19-23) about the role of food-and-drink pairings. The second involved experiments with 75 U.S. children (ages 3-5) to determine the role of drinks and [vegetable consumption](#). The same

preschoolers were tested on different days under differing scenarios involving drinks served with vegetables.

Older participants favored the combination of soda served with salty, calorie-dense foods rather than soda and vegetables. Preschoolers ate more raw vegetables, either [carrots](#) or red peppers, when accompanied with water rather than when accompanied by a sweetened beverage.

"Our taste preferences are heavily influenced by repeated exposure to particular foods and drinks," said Cornwell, the Edwin E. & June Woldt Cone Professor of Marketing in the Lundquist College of Business at the UO. "This begins early through exposure to meals served at home and by meal combinations offered by many restaurants. Our simple recommendation is to serve water with all meals. Restaurants easily could use water as their default drink in kids' meal combos and charge extra for other drink alternatives."

Serving water, McAlister said, could be a simple and effective dietary change to help address the nation's growing obesity problem, which has seen increasing number of diabetes cases in young adults and a rise in health-care costs in general. Drinking water with meals, Cornwell said, also would reduce dehydration. While estimates of dehydration vary by sources, many estimates suggest that 75 percent of adult Americans are chronically dehydrated.

From an early age, Cornwell said, children learn to associate sweet, high-calorie drinks such as colas with salty and fatty high-calorie-containing foods like French fries.

"While this combining seems as normal as rainfall in Northwest winters, when we look cross-culturally we can see that food-and-drink combinations are developed preferences," she said. "If the drink on the table sets the odds against both adults and children eating their

vegetables, then perhaps it is time to change that drink, and replace it with water."

In January 2011, Cornwell and McAlister reported in the same journal that a child's [taste preferences](#) for salt, sugar and fat are related to their knowledge of fast food and [soda](#) brands.

These studies suggest that early palate development may influence choices later in life, McAlister said. "From a policy perspective, this means that we need focus on early preference formation."

"This important research has broad ramifications for how foods are marketed and served," said Kimberly Andrews Espy, vice president for research and innovation at the UO. "Addressing the early contributors of unhealthy eating that contribute to obesity is important for our general well-being as a nation and, especially, for improving the nutritional choices our children will make over their lifetimes."

Provided by University of Oregon

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