

Children consuming sports drinks unnecessarily

June 27 2016

A high proportion of 12- to 14-year olds are regularly consuming sports drinks socially, increasing their risk of obesity and tooth erosion, concludes a Cardiff University School of Dentistry survey.

Published today in the British Dental Journal, the survey looked at 160 children in four schools across South Wales and concluded that children are attracted to [sports drinks](#) because of their sweet taste, low price, and availability, with most parents and children not aware that sports drinks are not intended for consumption by children.

Half of the children surveyed claimed to drink sports drinks socially and most (80%) purchased them in local shops. The majority (90%) also claimed that taste was a factor and only 18% claimed to drink them because of the perceived performance enhancing effect. Price was one of the top three recorded reasons for purchase and, of particular concern, 26% of children also cited leisure centres as purchase sources.

Maria Morgan, senior lecturer in dental public health at Cardiff University, said: "The purpose of sports drinks are being misunderstood and this study clearly shows evidence of high school age children being attracted to these high sugar and low pH level drinks, leading to an increased risk of dental cavities, enamel erosion and obesity.

"Dental health professionals should be aware of the popularity of sports drinks with children when giving health education or advice or designing health promotion initiatives."

The Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine (FSEM) is calling for tighter regulation around the price, availability and marketing of sports drinks to children, especially surrounding the school area, to safeguard general and dental health.

Dr Paul D Jackson, President of the FSEM UK, said: "The proportion of children in this study who consume high carbohydrate drinks, which are designed for sport, in a recreational non-sporting context is of concern.

"Sports drinks are intended for athletes taking part in endurance and intense sporting events, they are also connected with tooth decay in athletes and should be used following the advice of dental and healthcare teams dedicated to looking after athletes. Water or milk is sufficient enough to hydrate active children, high sugar sports drinks are unnecessary for children and most adults."

Russ Ladwa, chair of the British Dental Association's Health and Science Committee, added: "The rise of sports drinks as just another soft drink option among children is a real cause for concern, and both parents and government must take note. They are laden with acids and sugars, and could be behind the decay problems we're now seeing among top footballersii.

"Sports drinks are rarely a healthy choice, and marketing them to the general population, and young people in particular, is grossly irresponsible. Elite athletes might have reason to use them, but for almost everyone else they represent a real risk to both their oral and their general health."

The survey also concluded that there is particular confusion over the definition of a sports versus an energy drink. However, from a dental and wider health perspective, these two drinks have similar detrimental effects due to their high sugar content and low pH.

In supermarkets and shops, sports drinks are often sold alongside other sugar sweetened beverages. This is misleading [children](#) and parents by indicating that they are meant for use by everyone.

More information: D. Broughton et al. A survey of sports drinks consumption among adolescents, *BDJ* (2016). [DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.449](#)

Provided by Cardiff University

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