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No chocolate milk? No problem—kids get used to plain milk

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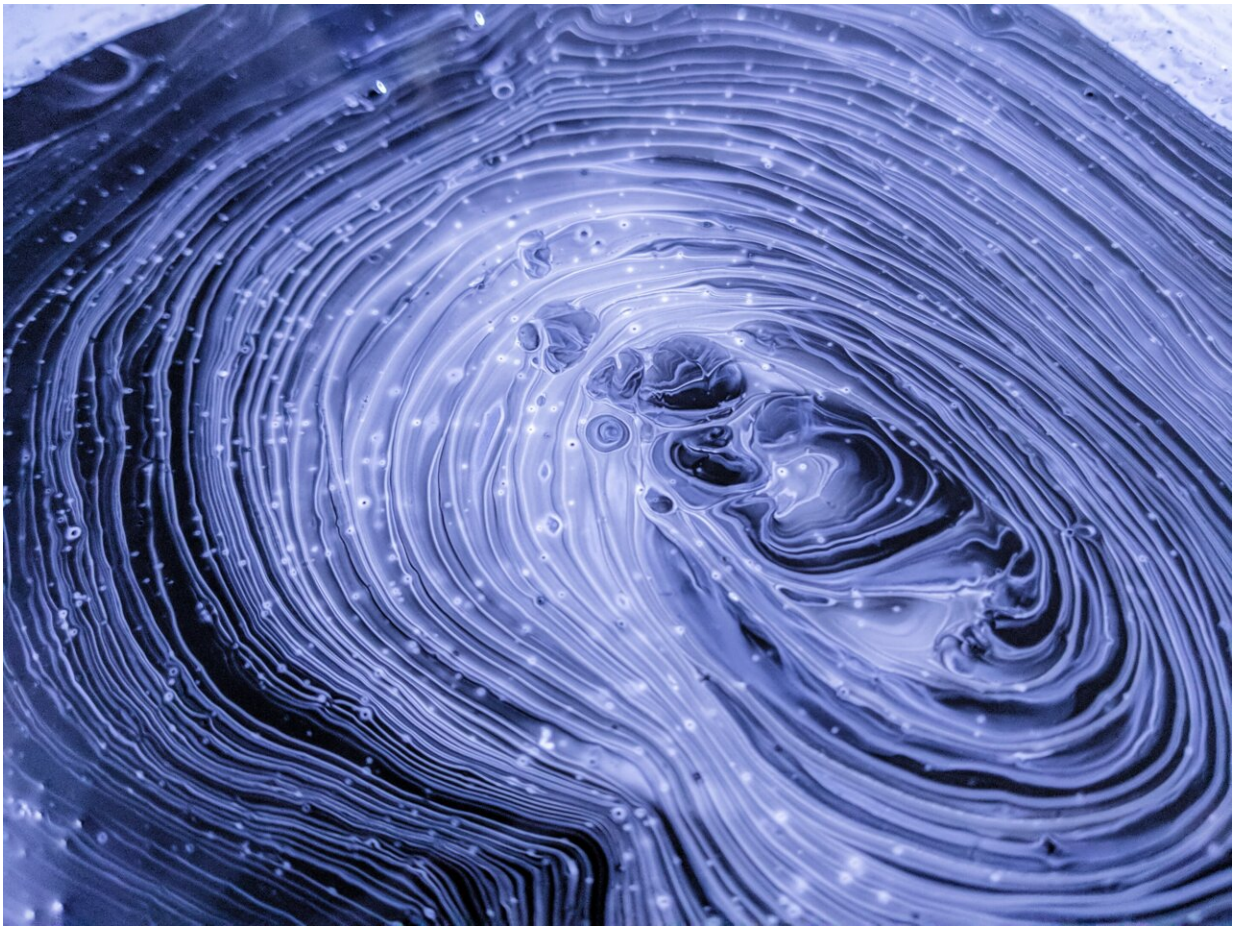

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A new study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the

University of Connecticut has found that most students adjust to drinking plain milk after flavored milk is removed from school lunch menus.

Flavored milk served in the National School Lunch Program contains up to 10 grams of added sugar per serving, which is 40 percent of a child's daily allowance of added sugar. Given the nation's key public health target of limiting added sugars in children's diets, flavored milk has come under scrutiny in the context of school nutrition.

The study measured plain milk selection and consumption in the years after flavored milk was removed in two schools. During the first year without flavored milk, 51.5 percent of students selected plain milk. Two years later, 72 percent of students selected plain milk. Both years, student selection and consumption of plain milk dropped significantly on days when 100 percent fruit juice was also available.

"The decision to remove flavored milk has both nutritional benefits and potential costs. It is clearly an effective way to lower student intake of added sugars at lunch, and over time, the majority of students will switch to plain milk," said Marlene Schwartz, professor of human development and family studies, director of the UConn Rudd Center, and lead author of the study. "However, there will always be some students who don't like plain milk. The challenge is finding a way to meet their dietary needs by providing other nutrient-rich options at lunch."

The study, published July 14 in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, has implications for school nutrition policy and efforts to reduce added sugars in children's diets.

The study was conducted in two elementary (K-8) schools in an urban New England school district during the 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 school years. Researchers assessed the selection and consumption of

milk immediately after flavored milk was removed in the 2010-2011 school year, and two years later in the 2012-2013 school year.

The selection and consumption of milk were compared on days when 100 percent fruit juice was offered and not offered. The average number of students in the lunch line when data was collected was 369 in one school, and 391 in the other school.

The study's key findings show:

- The first school year after flavored milk was removed, 51.5 percent of students selected milk and drank 4 ounces per carton, indicating school-wide per-student consumption of 2.1 ounces.
- Two years later, 72 percent of students selected milk and drank 3.4 ounces per carton, significantly increasing the school-wide per-student consumption to 2.5 ounces.
- Older students and boys consumed significantly more milk.
- The availability of 100 percent fruit juice at lunch was associated with a significant decrease in students selecting milk and lower milk consumption per carton throughout the years of the study.

"On days when schools had 100 percent juice, milk selection dropped considerably," Schwartz said. "To maximize student nutrition, the best combination may be to offer plain milk and whole fruit every day."

More information: Marlene B. Schwartz et al. Student Acceptance of Plain Milk Increases Significantly 2 Years after Flavored Milk Is Removed from School Cafeterias: An Observational Study, *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (2017). DOI: 10.1016/j.jand.2017.05.021

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