

Ask the Pediatrician: Is it OK to give my children juice and sports drinks?

May 24 2021, by Dr. Janine Rethy, American Academy Of Pediatrics



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Q: My kids really don't like drinking water. Can I give them juice and sports drinks instead?

A: Along with milk, plain water is the best drink choice for kids. Why? It's super healthy, with zero calories and no [added sugar](#). It helps keep joints, bones and teeth healthy, helps the blood circulate and can help kids maintain a healthy weight into adulthood. Being well-hydrated improves mood, memory and attention in children. And of course, tap water is much less expensive than [sports drinks](#), sodas and juice.

Water doesn't have to be boring! There are plenty of ways to entice everyone in the family to drink healthy and stay hydrated throughout the day. Being a good role model is a great way to help make water part of your children's routine and gets them in the habit of [drinking](#) water before they're thirsty. Here are a few twists to add some fun:

- Infuse water with lemons, berries, cucumber or mint for some added flavor. This is an easy way to keep the whole family coming back for refills.
- Keep fruits and vegetables that are high in water content handy. Some of the best vegetables are cucumber, zucchini, iceberg lettuce, celery and tomato. Top fruits include watermelon, cantaloupe, strawberries, blueberries and grapefruit.
- Freeze fruit in ice cubes to make your drinks more fun. Young children can help fill the trays.
- Delight kids with special water bottles or cups. Whether it is a personalized sports bottle or a fancy cup with an umbrella or swirly straw, adding a festive touch can make a difference.
- Make your own popsicles with pureed fruit for an afternoon cooldown. Make it a fun family activity by using small paper cups and letting your kids decorate them or find popsicle molds in fun shapes and colors.

Water and milk are all the drinks kids need, so don't believe all the hype surrounding many of the other drinks marketed to kids. These usually contain way more sugar than children need in a day and can contribute to

poor health. Here's what to avoid:

Sugary drinks: Make a rule that no sugar-sweetened beverages are allowed for children who are younger than 2. And try to limit them for your older children as much as possible. This includes sports drinks, juice cocktails, sodas, lemonade and sweetened water. These drinks discourage a habit of drinking plain water and can add extra empty calories to the diet. They can also leave your kids less hungry for the nutritious foods they really need. Added sugars can lead to excess weight gain, cavities, diabetes and more.

- **Juice:** Even 100% juice should be strictly limited. While it can contain some vitamins, these drinks are high in sugar and calories and low in the healthy fiber found in whole fruit. Because of its [sweet taste](#), once children are offered juice, it can be difficult to get them to drink plain water.
- **Flavored milk:** Although it has calcium and vitamins, flavored milk can be much higher in sugar. These added sugars should be avoided to discourage a preference for sweet flavors, which can make it difficult when offering regular milk.
- **Stevia or artificially sweetened drinks:** Because [health risks](#) for children from stevia and [artificial sweeteners](#) are not well understood, it is best to avoid these drinks. Instead, make water readily available to encourage healthy hydration.

Many parents ask how much liquid kids need. At about 6 months, babies can be introduced to water. They only need about four to eight ounces per day until they are a year old because the rest of their liquids are coming from breast milk or formula.

To stay well hydrated, [children](#) ages 1-3 years need approximately four cups of beverages per day, including [water](#) or milk. This increases for older kids to around five cups for those ages 4-8, and 7-8 cups for [older](#)

children. These amounts vary by individual and may need to be adjusted, depending on levels of activity and heat and humidity outdoors.

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