

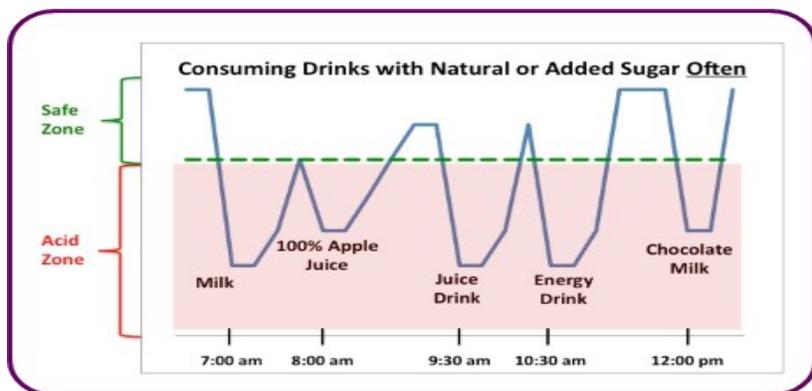


## Health Services Newsletter

### THE ROLE OF DRINKS WITH SUGAR IN CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH

February is National Children's Dental Health Month, an ideal time to promote the importance of oral health and increase awareness of how drinks with sugar contribute to tooth decay. Some parents don't realize that many drinks they serve to young children contain natural or added sugar. Drinks with natural or added sugar are a major contributor to tooth decay.

Sugar plays a key role in tooth decay (see *Brush Up on Oral Health* newsletter, [April 2013](#)). Bacteria that cause tooth decay breaks down drinks with sugar to form acid. Each time a person consumes a drink with sugar or eats a starchy, chewy, or sticky food, acid is in the mouth for 20 to 40 minutes.



The figure shows a morning where a child consumes drinks with natural or added sugar often. The blue line in the shaded red area shows that acid is in the child's mouth almost all morning. If a child consumes drinks with sugar throughout the day on a regular basis, acid will be in his or her mouth for long periods of time and may cause tooth decay.



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### DRINKS CONTAINING NATURAL OR ADDED SUGAR

Drinks that contain natural or added sugar include:

- Milk, non-flavored
- Flavored milk, such as chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla milk
- Fruit juice, such as apple, grape, and orange juice
- Pop or soda, non-diet
- Fruit drinks, such as fruit punch and juice cocktails
- Vitamin water
- Sweetened teas
- Energy and sports drinks

Sugar-free drinks like diet pop or soda can also harm teeth. They contain acid that can wear away the outer covering of teeth. This makes a tooth's outer surface thinner and more likely to develop decay.

## PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Your program can do the following things to support healthy drink habits for children enrolled in Head Start:

- Establish a policy stating that only milk and water will be served to children in conjunction with meals, snacks, parties, and other celebrations.
- Establish a policy that infants are not put to sleep with bottles or sippy cups filled with drinks with natural or added sugar (any drink other than water).
- Encourage Head Start staff to model healthy drinking habits.
- Encourage Head Start staff to educate parents about the effect of drinks with natural and added sugar on children's teeth and about making healthy drink choices.
- Remind Head Start staff to brush children's teeth with fluoride toothpaste or wipe infant's gums after meals. (See [Brush Up on Oral Health newsletter, September 2014.](#))

## HEALTHY DRINKS FOR CHILDREN

Breast milk provides ideal nutrition for infants to support optimal growth and development. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, and many other professional organizations recommend breast milk for infants for the first 6 months of life or longer. If infants are not breastfed or if supplemental milk is needed, then infant formula is the best choice for the first year of life. Children should not be fed whole milk until age 1.

Milk is a great drink for children. It provides nutrients for healthy growth and development. Serve unflavored whole milk to children up to age 2 and serve unflavored low-fat (1 percent) or non-fat (skim) milk to children ages 2 and older. Because milk contains natural sugar, it is best to serve it only at scheduled meals and snacks. Always serve milk in a cup.

Water is the best drink for children between meals. Water contains important nutrients to keep children healthy and does not contain sugar. Water from the faucet is safe and cheap. In most communities, water also contains fluoride, which helps prevent tooth decay.

All fruit juices contain natural sugar and may contain added sugar. If parents give their child fruit juice, it should be 100 percent fruit juice and no more than 4 to 6 ounces per day. Fruit juice should never be diluted to stretch out the number of times it can be given during the day. Always serve fruit juice in a cup.

Children should not be put to bed or comforted with a bottle or sippy cup containing breast milk, infant formula, milk, juice, or anything other than water. Sippy cups are designed only to help children transition from drinking from a bottle to drinking from a cup and to prevent spills during weaning. They are not intended for use over months and years. Long-term use of sippy cups can cause children to drink too much and can contribute to tooth decay. Except when used at mealtime, sippy cups should contain only water. Encourage parents to teach children to drink from a cup without a lid. Children may ask adults to hold the cup, initially. By age 12 to 14 months, most children can drink from a cup.



## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES

Explain to parents the role sugar plays in the tooth decay process and that consuming drinks with natural or added sugar often can put their child at risk for developing tooth decay.

- Teach parents how to find sugar in the ingredients list in food labels.
- Tell parents to not to let their child carry a bottle or sippy cup containing drinks with natural or added sugar during the day. Sippy cups should contain only water, unless being used at mealtime.
- Teach parents that children should not be put to sleep with bottles or sippy cups containing drinks with natural or added sugar.
- Show parents [The New Drink Pyramid](#) that provides an easy way to understand what drinks to give children, and when. Give parents the handout to take home and keep in their kitchen.
- Review the tips in [Choosing Healthy Drinks for Your Young Child](#) with parents, and give them a copy of the handout.
- Encourage parents to give children water, ideally fluoridated tap water, between meals.
- Encourage parents to serve milk at scheduled meal and snack times.
- If parents offer juice, tell them to wait until the child is at least 6 months old and to offer no more than 4 to 6 ounces of 100 percent fruit juice per day. Serve the juice in a cup.
- Suggest parents give children frozen or fresh fruit that has been mashed or cut into bite-size pieces instead of juice.
- Tell parents to use a clean, damp washcloth to clean the baby's gums even before they can see the first tooth. Encourage parents to clean the baby's gum twice a day, especially after night feeding.
- Tell parents to begin brushing the baby's teeth with fluoride toothpaste as soon as the first tooth appears in the baby's mouth. For children under age 3, use a smear (grain of rice) of fluoride toothpaste. For children ages 3 and older, use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Encourage parents to brush the child's teeth twice a day, especially before bed. (See Brush Up on Oral Health newsletter, [December 2013](#)).

## FINDING HIDDEN SUGAR IN DRINKS

Finding out whether a drink contains natural or added sugar is easy. The best place to check is in the ingredients list on the food label. Look for words like:

- Beet sugar
- Brown sugar
- Cane sugar
- Corn sweeteners
- Corn syrup
- Cane juice
- Honey
- Malt syrup
- Maple syrup
- High fructose corn syrup
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Sugar
- White sugar

**INGREDIENTS:** MILK, SUGAR, CORN SYRUP, NONFAT MILK, WHEY, COCOA PROCESSED WITH ALKALI, MONO- AND DIGLYCERIDES, CELLULOSE GUM, CARRAGEENAN, GUAR GUM, LOCUST BEAN GUM, VITAMIN D3.  
A GLUTEN FREE PRODUCT.

This ingredient list shows two types of sugar added to chocolate milk.

## FOR YOUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER

You can tailor the following information to include in your newsletter for families:

Limiting the number of times your child has a drink that contains natural or added sugar during the day is a key factor in preventing tooth decay. Sugar-free drinks like diet pop or soda can also harm teeth. They contain acid that can wear away the outer covering of teeth, making it thinner and more likely to decay.

Water from the tap is the best drink to serve between meals because it contains fluoride, has no sugar, and does not promote tooth decay. Here are some tips you can use to encourage your child to drink water between meals:

- **Model it:** Be a good role model by drinking water instead of drinks with sugar. Young children learn by watching, and you are your child's best role model.
- **Offer it:** Offer water when your child is thirsty between meals. Don't give your child any other drink choices.
- **Make it fun:** Let your child drink from single-use bendy, silly, or colored straws. Or let your child choose a favorite cup or water bottle.
- **Keep it portable:** Water bottles can be carried anywhere and refilled with tap water.
- **Flavor it:** Add a lemon, lime, or orange slice or fresh mint leaves to water. Or add fruit like blueberries, raspberries, or strawberries. Never add sugar to water.
- **Ice it:** Serve water with ice cubes or crushed ice. Look for ice cube trays in fun shapes like dinosaurs, letters, or animals.
- **Make it available:** Set up a station where your child can get a drink of water when he or she is thirsty. It can be as simple as keeping a non-breakable water pitcher on a low counter or on a chair where your child can reach it.

## RESOURCES

### Resources on ECKLC

*Brush Up on Oral Health*, [June 2014](#) (Community water fluoridation)

*Brush Up on Oral Health*, [June 2013](#) (Healthy drinks)

*Brush Up on Oral Health*, [May 2013](#) (Sugar)

*Brush Up on Oral Health*, [April 2013](#) (Tooth decay)

*Choosing Healthy Drinks for Your Young Child* ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))

### Other Resources

*[From Baby Bottle to Cup: Choose Training Cups Carefully, Use Them Temporarily](#)* produced by the American Dental Association

*[Make Better Beverage Choices: 10 Tips to Get Started](#)* produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition and Policy and Promotion ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))

*[The New Drink Pyramid](#)* produced by Nikki Stone

*Fostering a culture of health and wellness for Head Start children, families, and staff.*

#### NATIONAL CENTER ON HEALTH

##### Our Goal:

To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

#### CONTACT US!

The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [nchinfo@aap.org](mailto:nchinfo@aap.org) or call (888) 227-5125.

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***School readiness begins with health!***



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Health