

Healthy Beverage Recommendations for School-Age Children and Adolescents

Healthy Eating Research

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Background and Rationale

Research shows that what children drink can have a big impact on their health. With so many choices available and new products in the marketplace, it can be confusing for parents and children to know which drinks are healthy, and which drinks should be avoided. Many beverages contain added sugars that can contribute to the risk of overweight, obesity, dental caries, and type 2 diabetes, when consumed in excess. Others contain non-sugar sweeteners, caffeine, or other ingredients with purported health benefits. National consumption data also reveal disparities in beverage intake across racial and ethnic groups, highlighting the need for supportive policies and environments that promote healthy beverage consumption to address both health outcomes and nutrition inequities.

Given the importance of beverage consumption throughout the lifespan and the need for comprehensive and consistent evidence-based recommendations, Healthy Eating Research (HER) convened an expert panel representing four key national health and nutrition organizations to develop recommendations for beverage consumption consistent with a healthy diet for children and adolescents ages 5 to 18 years. The four organizations represented on the expert panel are the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the Academy), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the American Heart Association (AHA). The resulting [consensus statement](#) highlights the recommendations, and the [technical report](#) details the scientific evidence underlying the recommendations.



Approach

The expert panel included two co-chairs with expertise in children's beverage consumption, two representatives appointed by each of the four organizations, and a research consultant. Nine additional experts in nutrition and dietary guidance served on the scientific advisory committee, which provided input throughout the consensus process on the panel methodology and protocols. The panel used a multi-step process to review current recommendations and the latest research on the health impacts of beverage consumption to develop the following recommendations, which were approved by all participating organizations.

Recommendations

The beverage recommendations put forward by this expert panel are based on the best available evidence, and in some cases, expert opinion. The recommendations are presented in three categories:









1. Beverages to drink: Plain drinking water and plain pasteurized milk.
2. Beverages to limit: 100% juice, plant-based milk alternatives, and sweetened flavored milk.
3. Beverages to avoid: Sugar-sweetened beverages, beverages with non-sugar sweeteners, and caffeinated beverages.

A summary of the recommendations is provided in the following table. The complete recommendations, rationale, methodology, and evidence are presented in the [technical report](#).

Conclusion

The goal of this consensus panel is to provide consistent messages that can be used by healthcare providers, public health practitioners, and parents and other caregivers to improve the beverage intake patterns of children and adolescents. The level of collaboration and consistency among major national health and nutrition organizations represented in these recommendations has the capacity to make meaningful change and improve the health and well-being of 5- to 18-year-olds throughout the United States.

Recommendations for Healthy Beverage Consumption, Ages 5-18 Years

	5 through 8 Years	9 through 13 Years	14 through 18 Years
Total Hydration Needs*	40 fl oz of total beverages per day (~5 cups)	54-61 fl oz of total beverages per day (~6.75-7.6 cups)	61-88 fl oz of total beverages per day (~7.6-11 cups)
 Plain Drinking Water**	16-40 fl oz per day (2-5 cups)	22-61 fl oz per day (2.75-7.6 cups)	29-88 fl oz per day (3.6-11 cups)
 Plain Pasteurized Milk	up to 20 fl oz per day (2.5 cup eq/day)	up to 24 fl oz per day (3 cup eq/day)	up to 24 fl oz per day (3 cup eq/day)
 100% Juice	Limit < 4-6 fl oz per day (½ to ¾ cup/day)	Limit < 6-8 fl oz per day (¾ to 1 cup/day)	Limit < 8 fl oz per day (1 cup/day)
 Plant-Based Milk Alternatives	Only recommended when medically indicated (e.g., milk protein allergy) or to meet specific dietary patterns (e.g., vegan). Choose alternatives that are nutritionally similar to milk, such as unsweetened, fortified soy milk. Avoid plant-based milk alternatives containing added sugar or non-sugar sweeteners (NSS).		
 Sweetened Flavored Milk	Avoid or Limit consumption due to the high amount of added sugars per serving.		
 Sugar-Sweetened Beverages	Not Recommended		
 Beverages with Non-Sugar Sweeteners	Not Recommended		
 Beverages with Caffeine and Other Stimulants	Not Recommended		

*Total Hydration Needs represent the total volume of fluids per day consumed as beverages; amounts are based on median intake to avoid dehydration and should not be considered maximums or minimums. Total hydration needs vary for each individual based on sex, age, and weight, and will vary day-to-day based on factors such as climate and physical activity. Plain drinking water is the primary recommended beverage for meeting hydration needs.

**Plain drinking water ranges are determined using the quantities in total hydration needs minus the maximum recommended quantities of milk and 100% juice. Individual needs vary day-to-day.

Note about unit conversions: 1 cup = 8 fluid ounces = 237 mL

Learn more about what experts recommend at HealthyEatingResearch.org.

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Scan to view the full recommendations.

In 2019, HER convened the same four organizations to develop comprehensive beverage recommendations for young children, birth to 5 years. Those recommendations can be found at HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org.