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Top Health Experts Release New Drink Recommendations for Kids and Teens' Overall Health

Leading Health Organizations Say 5- to 18-Year-Olds Should Mostly Drink Water and Plain Milk; Avoid Sugar-Sweetened Beverages, Beverages with Non-Sugar Sweeteners and Caffeine

Durham, N.C.—(January 29, 2025)—Experts from leading health and nutrition organizations recommend kids and teens drink plain water, plain pasteurized milk, and limited amounts of 100% fruit and vegetable juice for optimal nutrition and hydration. Other beverages like plant-based milk alternatives and flavored milks should be limited, while sugar-sweetened beverages, beverages with non-sugar sweeteners, and beverages with caffeine or other stimulants should be avoided.

These evidence-based recommendations were developed as part of a collaboration by experts from the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics \(the Academy\)](#), [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry \(AAPD\)](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) under the leadership of [Healthy Eating Research \(HER\)](#) and with funding from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#). The same organizations convened in 2019 to release healthy beverage guidelines for [0- to 5-year-olds](#) that are used by clinicians, registered dietitian nutritionists, dentists, public health departments, parents, and caregivers across the country.

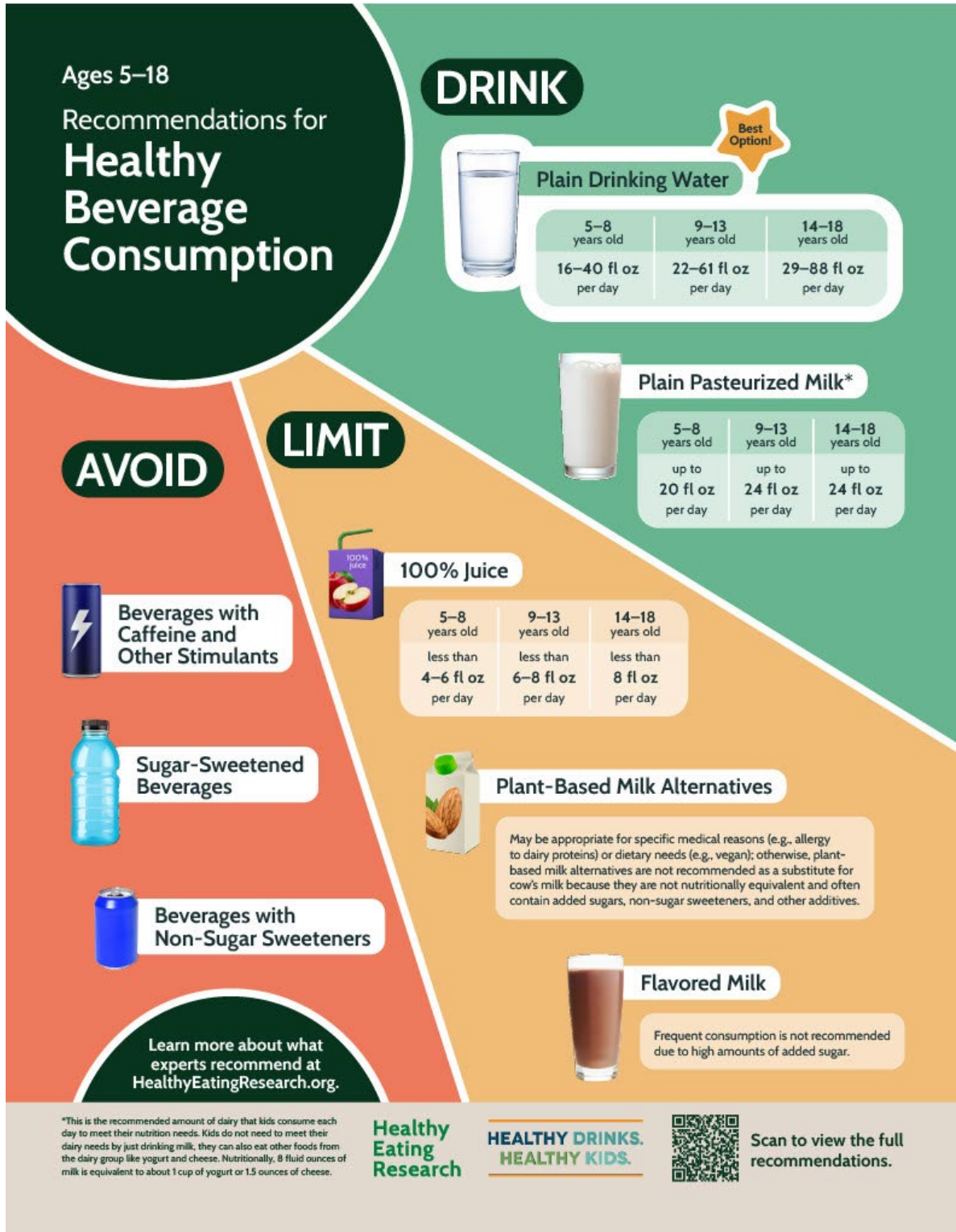
“We all want our kids to grow up healthy, and research shows that what kids and teens drink is an important part of a balanced diet, not just what they eat. But with so many drink products on the market right now, it can be hard for families to figure out what’s healthy and what’s not,” said Megan Elsener Lott, MPH, RDN, deputy director of HER, which convened the expert panel. “These recommendations provide a gold standard based on the latest research and can serve as goals that families work toward together.”

Many beverages on the market, such as sports drinks and soda, contain added sugars that can [contribute to the risk](#) of dental cavities and diet-related diseases like type 2 diabetes and overweight or obesity. Even drinks that contain non-sugar sweeteners—like diet or lite drinks—are not as healthy as previously thought, given new [research](#) showing they may not help control body weight and may increase the risk of diet-related chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Beverages with caffeine and other stimulants, such as coffee and energy drinks, are also popular, despite evidence suggesting there is no safe amount of caffeine for children under 18 years and it can contribute to poor [sleep quality, increased blood pressure, depressive moods, and anxiety](#).

Healthy Beverage Recommendations: A Snapshot

To make choices easier for families, the organizations created three categories to help with decision-making: beverages to drink, beverages to limit, and beverages to avoid.



“Choosing healthy beverages for children is just as important as choosing healthy foods, and the recommended beverages for most children and adolescents are plain water and unsweetened milk,” said Amy Reed, MS, RD, CSP, LD, spokesperson for the Academy. “These recommendations offer families practical ways to align their beverage choices with their children’s individual nutritional goals to support a healthy diet.”

“What children drink has a direct impact on their oral health, and making the right beverage choices can help prevent cavities and protect developing teeth,” said Paul Casamassimo, DDS, who represented AAPD on the expert panel. “Sugary drinks are some of the biggest culprits for tooth decay in kids, and we hope the recommendations that this expert panel developed will be a useful tool for parents to make decisions to support their child’s overall health.”

To develop the evidence-based recommendations, HER conducted an extensive review of scientific literature, existing guidelines from national and international bodies, and reports on childhood and adolescent beverage consumption. It also convened an expert panel of representatives from the Academy, AAPD, AAP, and AHA to review the evidence and develop recommendations. A scientific advisory committee of independent experts in pediatrics, childhood nutrition, dentistry, and dietary and nutrition guidance was also formed to advise the process and review the preliminary and final recommendations.

“As a pediatrician, I know how critical it is for children and teens to grow up with healthy habits that support their physical and emotional development,” said Mark Corkins, MD, member of the expert panel and chair of the AAP Committee on Nutrition. “These new recommendations offer clear, evidence-based guidance to help families make informed decisions about what their kids and teens should drink at every stage of development.”

“Added sugars and caffeine in drinks can put children and adolescents at risk for heart and diet-related diseases,” said Linda Van Horn, PhD, RDN, AHA Nutrition Committee volunteer who represented the association on the expert panel and is chief of the nutrition division in the department of preventive medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. “At the American Heart Association, we’re committed to equipping families with the practical guidance they need to form heart-healthy habits early on and maintain them throughout life.”

The full recommendations and accompanying technical report can be found at healthyeatingresearch.org. This site will also contain a set of infographics in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Tagalog covering different topics included in the recommendations, such as tips for swapping out drinks with added sugars, understanding caffeine levels in different drinks, and finding the right plant-based milk alternative for children who might be allergic to plain milk or who are vegan.

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