

Healthy Beverage Recommendations: Children 0-5

September 2019

Research shows that what children drink – from birth through age 5 – can have a big impact on their health. With so many choices, it can be confusing to know which drinks are healthy and which ones to avoid. That’s why some of the nation’s leading experts on children’s health came together to develop new recommendations to help parents choose what’s best for their kids. Whether it is a question about milk, juice, water, or other drinks, these new recommendations clear up the confusion and help parents set their kids on the path for healthy growth and development.

These recommendations were developed by experts at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), and the American Heart Association (AHA) under the leadership of Healthy Eating Research (HER), a leading nutrition research organization, and with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. While every child is different, the nation’s leading health organizations agree that for most kids, the following recommendations can help to set children on a path for healthy growth and development.

0-6 months: Babies need only breast milk or infant formula.

6-12 months: In addition to breast milk or infant formula, offer a small amount of drinking water once solid foods are introduced to help babies get familiar with the taste – just a few sips at meal times is all it takes. It’s best for children under 1 not to drink juice. Even 100% fruit juice offers no nutritional benefits over whole fruit.

12-24 months: It’s time to add whole milk, which has many essential nutrients, along with plain drinking water for hydration. A small amount of juice is ok, but make sure it’s 100% fruit juice to avoid added sugar. Better yet, serve small pieces of real fruit, which is even healthier.

2-5 years: Milk and water are the go-to beverages. Look for milks with less fat than whole milk, like skim (non-fat) or low-fat (1%). If you choose to serve 100% fruit juice, stick to a small amount, and remember adding water can make a little go a long way!

All children 5 and under should avoid drinking flavored milks (e.g., chocolate, strawberry), toddler formulas, plant-based/non-dairy milks (e.g., almond, rice, oat)*, caffeinated beverages (e.g., soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks) and sugar- and low-calorie sweetened beverages (e.g., “diet” or “light” drinks, including those sweetened with stevia or sucralose), as these beverages can be big sources of added sugars in young children’s diets and provide no unique nutritional value.

**Notes: Evidence indicates that, with the exception of fortified soy milk, many plant-based/non-dairy milk alternatives lack key nutrients found in cow’s milk. Our bodies cannot absorb nutrients in these non-dairy milks as well as they can from regular milk. Non-dairy milks may be a good choice if a child is allergic to dairy, lactose intolerant, or is in a family that has made specific dietary choices such as abstaining from animal products. Be sure to consult with your health care provider to choose the right milk substitute to ensure that your child is still getting adequate amounts of the key nutrients found in milk, such as protein, calcium, and vitamin D, which are essential for healthy growth and development.*

See the full recommendations and learn more at www.healthydrinkshealthykids.org.

Recommendations by Age

0-6 months

Drink:

- Young infants need only breast milk or infant formula to get enough fluids and proper nutrition.

Avoid:

- Infants younger than 6 months should not drink juice, milk, flavored milks (e.g., chocolate, strawberry), “transition” or “weaning” formulas (sometimes called toddler milks, growing up milks, or follow up formulas), plant-based and non-dairy milks (e.g., almond, rice, oat), caffeinated beverages (e.g., soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks), low-calorie sweetened beverages (e.g., “diet” or “light” drinks, including those sweetened with Stevia or Sucralose), or sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., soda, fruit drinks and fruit flavored drinks, fruit-ades, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and sweetened coffee and tea beverages).

More detailed information about these different kinds of drinks and why they are or are not healthy for young children can be found in the full report.

6-12 months

Drink:

- Infants between 6 and 12 months should still rely on breast milk or infant formula to get most of their daily nutritional needs. Breast milk and/or infant formula also provide all of the baby’s fluid needs during this time.
- Once solid foods are introduced, which is typically around 6 months, try adding in a couple of sips of water during meal times. It helps babies develop cup-drinking skills and learn to like the taste of water, which takes time.

Avoid:

- Infants younger than 12 months should not drink juice, milk, flavored milks (e.g., chocolate, strawberry), “transition” or “weaning” formulas (sometimes called toddler milks, growing up milks, or follow up formulas), plant-based and non-dairy milks (e.g., almond, rice, oat), caffeinated beverages (e.g., soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks), low-calorie sweetened beverages (e.g., “diet” or “Light” drinks, including those sweetened with Stevia or Sucralose), or sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., soda, fruit drinks and fruit flavored drinks, fruit-ades, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and sweetened coffee and tea beverages). These beverages can be big sources of added sugars in young children’s diets and provide no unique nutritional value beyond eating a balanced diet and sticking to water and milk. And, avoiding these kinds of beverages at a young age helps to create and maintain healthy habits down the road.

More detailed information about these different kinds of drinks and why they are or are not healthy for young children can be found in the full report.

12-24 months

Drink:

Water

- Children between 12 and 24 months should drink 1 to 4 cups of water daily to get enough fluids.
- The amount of water each child needs might vary from day-to-day based on how active s/he is, the weather, or the amount of fluids s/he gets from other beverages like milk or foods like soups and applesauce.

Milk

- Children between 12 and 24 months old can be introduced to plain, pasteurized whole milk, which is full of nutrients such as calcium, protein and vitamin D that are important for growing bodies. The recommended amount is 2 to 3 cups per day.
- Whether your one-year-old needs 2 cups or 3 will depend on how much solid food s/he eats. As children get closer to 2 years and transition to eating more food at mealtimes, they will need less milk.
- If there is a family history of obesity or heart disease, reduced-fat (2%) or low-fat (1%) milk may be considered in place of whole milk, in consultation with your child's pediatrician.

Limit:

100% Fruit Juice

- Children 12 to 24 months old should drink no more than 4 ounces of 100% fruit juice per day. Adding water to 100% fruit juice can make a little bit go a long way.
- As much as possible, children should meet their daily fruit intake by eating fruit in fresh, canned, or frozen forms without added sugars, rather than by drinking juice, as this is the best option.
- If this is not possible, then a combination of whole fruit and 100% fruit juice is okay, as long as a child does not drink more than the upper limit of 4 ounces per day.
- This is because juice, even 100% fruit juice, can contribute to dental cavities, and if kids drink more than is recommended, it can have other negative health impacts such as weight gain.

Avoid:

- Children 12 to 24 months old should not drink flavored milks (e.g., chocolate, strawberry), "transition" or "weaning" formulas (sometimes called toddler milks, growing up milks, or follow up formulas), plant-based and non-dairy milks (e.g., almond, rice, oat), caffeinated beverages (e.g., soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks), low-calorie sweetened beverages (e.g., "diet" or "light" drinks, including those sweetened with Stevia or Sucralose), or sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., soda, fruit drinks and fruit flavored drinks, fruit-ades, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and sweetened coffee and tea beverages).
- Plant milks/non-dairy beverages are not recommended for exclusive consumption in place of milk. Evidence indicates that, with the exception of fortified soy milk, many plant-based/non-dairy milk alternatives lack key nutrients found in cow's milk. Our bodies cannot absorb nutrients in these non-dairy milks as well as they can from regular milk. Non-dairy milks may be a good choice if a child is allergic to dairy, lactose intolerant, or is in a family that has made specific dietary choices such as abstaining from animal products. Be sure to consult with your health care provider to choose the right milk substitute to ensure that your child is still getting adequate amounts of the key nutrients found in milk, such as protein, calcium, and vitamin D, which are essential for healthy growth and development.

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2-3 years

Drink:

Water

- Children 2 to 3 years old should drink 1 to 4 cups of water daily to get enough fluids.
- The amount of water each child needs might vary from day-to-day based on how active s/he is, the weather, or the amount of fluids s/he gets from other beverages like milk or foods like soups and applesauce.

Milk

- Children 2 to 3 years old should transition to plain, pasteurized fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk. The recommended amount is up to 2 cups a day.
- Transitioning to lower fat milks helps children stay within daily calorie recommendations, which helps promote a healthy weight. However, if your child is underweight or has other medical needs, consult with your health care provider to choose the best beverages for your child.

Limit:

100% Fruit Juice

- Children 2 to 3 years old should drink no more than 4 ounces of 100% juice per day. Adding water to 100% fruit juice can make a little bit go a long way.
- As much as possible, children should meet their daily fruit intake by eating fruit in fresh, canned, or frozen forms without added sugars, rather than by drinking juice, as this is the best option.
- If this is not possible, then a combination of whole fruit and 100% juice is okay, as long as a child does not drink more than the upper limit of 4 ounces per day.
- This is because juice, even 100% fruit juice, can contribute to dental cavities, and if kids drink more than is recommended, it can have other negative health impacts such as weight gain.

Avoid:

- Children 2 to 3 years old should not drink flavored milks (e.g., chocolate, strawberry), “transition” or “weaning” formulas (sometimes called toddler milks, growing up milks, or follow up formulas), plant-based and non-dairy milks (e.g., almond, rice, oat), caffeinated beverages, low-calorie sweetened beverages (e.g. “diet” or “light” drinks, including those sweetened with Stevia or Sucralose), or sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., soda, fruit drinks and fruit flavored drinks, fruit-ades, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and sweetened coffee and tea beverages).
- Plant milks/non-dairy beverages are not recommended for exclusive consumption in place of milk. Evidence indicates that, with the exception of fortified soy milk, many plant-based/non-dairy milk alternatives lack key nutrients found in cow’s milk. Our bodies cannot absorb nutrients in these non-dairy milks as well as they can from regular milk. Non-dairy milks may be a good choice if a child is allergic to dairy, lactose intolerant, or is in a family that has made specific dietary choices such as abstaining from animal products. Be sure to consult with your health care provider to choose the right milk substitute to ensure that your child is still getting adequate amounts of the key nutrients found in milk, such as protein, calcium, and vitamin D, which are essential for healthy growth and development.

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4-5 years

Drink:

Water

- Children 4 to 5 years old should drink 1.5 to 5 cups of water a day.
- The amount of water each child needs might vary from day-to-day based on how active s/he is, the weather, or the amount of fluids s/he gets from other beverages like milk or foods like soups and applesauce.

Milk

- Children 4 to 5 years old should drink plain, pasteurized fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk. The recommended amount is up to 2.5 cups a day.

Limit:

100% Fruit Juice

- Children ages 4 to 5 years old should drink no more than 4-6 ounces of 100% juice per day. Adding water to 100% fruit juice can make a little bit of juice go a long way.
- As much as possible, children should meet their daily fruit intake by eating fruit in fresh, canned, or frozen forms without added sugars, rather than by drinking juice, as this is the best option.
- If this is not possible, then a combination of whole fruit and 100% juice is okay, as long as a child does not drink more than the upper limit of 6 ounces per day.
- This is because juice, even 100% fruit juice, can contribute to dental cavities, and if kids drink more than is recommended, it can have other negative health impacts such as weight gain.

Avoid:

- Children 4 to 5 years old should not drink flavored milks (e.g., chocolate, strawberry), “transition” or “weaning” formulas (sometimes called toddler milks, growing up milks, or follow up formulas), plant-based and non-dairy milks (e.g., almond, rice, oat), caffeinated beverages (e.g., soda, coffee, tea, energy drinks), low-calorie sweetened beverages (e.g. “diet” or “light” drinks, including those sweetened with Stevia or Sucralose), or sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., soda, fruit drinks and fruit flavored drinks, fruit-ades, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and sweetened coffee and tea beverages).
- Plant milks/non-dairy beverages are not recommended for exclusive consumption in place of milk. Evidence indicates that, with the exception of fortified soy milk, many plant-based/non-dairy milk alternatives lack key nutrients found in cow’s milk. Our bodies cannot absorb nutrients in these non-dairy milks as well as they can from regular milk. Non-dairy milks may be a good choice if a child is allergic to dairy, lactose intolerant, or is in a family that has made specific dietary choices such as abstaining from animal products. Be sure to consult with your health care provider to choose the right milk substitute to ensure that your child is still getting adequate amounts of the key nutrients found in milk, such as protein, calcium, and vitamin D, which are essential for healthy growth and development.

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