

## Children Are Drinking Too Many Soft Drinks

Soft drinks and sugar-sweetened fruit drinks have largely replaced more nutritious beverages such as water, milk and fruit juice in children and teenagers' diets during the past two decades. The US Department of Agriculture reports that soft drink consumption by children has increased dramatically, while milk consumption has dropped by a similar proportion.<sup>1, 2</sup>

There are many reasons to be concerned. Milk is the primary source of calcium in children's diets.<sup>1, 2</sup> Calcium intake has decreased significantly in many children due to the displacement of milk by soft drinks. Calcium is required to maximize peak bone mass during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, which has been found to be important in preventing osteoporosis. Studies have suggested that insufficient calcium intake early in life may result in as much as a 50% greater risk of hip fractures later in life. In addition to calcium, many children are lacking in other important nutrients found in milk and fruit juices including magnesium, riboflavin, vitamins A and C, and folate.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Another undesirable effect of drinking too many soft drinks is a high calorie intake with few nutrients and no fiber. This significantly increases the risk of childhood obesity.<sup>1-3</sup> One study showed that children who consume two cans of soda per day were three times more likely to be overweight.<sup>3</sup> Another showed that being overweight was directly related to number of calories children consumed from soft drinks, confirming that overweight children are more likely than others to be heavy consumers of soft drinks.<sup>1-3</sup>

It therefore stands to reason that youth would benefit greatly from a shift in their beverage consumption, replacing soft drinks and other high-calorie/low-nutrient beverages with water and milk.<sup>1-6</sup> Fruit juice can also benefit a child's diet, but should be limited to 2 cups per day. It is better to eat fruit rather than drink fruit juice since it has the added benefit of fiber.

Although drinking low-fat milk is important for children and teenagers, water is important, too. After drinking the recommended 2 to 4 cups daily of low-fat milk, children should be encouraged to drink water, rather than sweetened beverages.<sup>1, 2, 6</sup> The recommended daily quantity of water is from 4 to 8 cups, depending upon a child's activity, daily variation in temperature and humidity, and the amount of fruits, vegetables, soup, and other fluids consumed.

**The Healthy Kids Meal & Motion Markers™ system** is a fun way to get kids drinking more water instead of sweetened drinks. Children love to drink water so they can use the photo markers to track their progress on their daily chart. Drinking water is a great habit for children to bring with them into adulthood. **The Meal & Motion Markers Dry Erase Flip Chart** encourages milk and water in a child's diet.

### References:

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