

Sports Drinks in Schools: Do Kids Really Need Them?

Sports drinks have become a popular alternative to sodas and high-calorie drinks for school-age children. As a result of heavy marketing by product manufacturers, many parents and children believe sports drinks to be healthy beverage options.¹ In actuality, sports drinks are little more than sugar-water with added salt, and are only appropriate for people participating in high-intensity physical activity lasting 60 minutes or more, such as long-distance running.

Since most students do not participate in high-intensity workouts for 60-minutes or more during school hours, sports drinks should not be sold or served in schools. In fact, the National Academies' Institute of Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics both conclude that sports drinks are unnecessary for students engaged in routine physical activity, and that water is the most appropriate drink to keep children hydrated.^{2,3}



Kids of All Ages Buy and Consume Sports Drinks at School

- Sugary sports drinks make up the second largest beverage category in high schools, with nearly 1 in 5 drinks sold being sports drinks.⁴ Sports drinks are the third largest beverage category in middle and elementary schools.⁴
- In the 2010-11 school year, 55% of middle school students and 80% of high school students could buy sports drinks at school.⁵

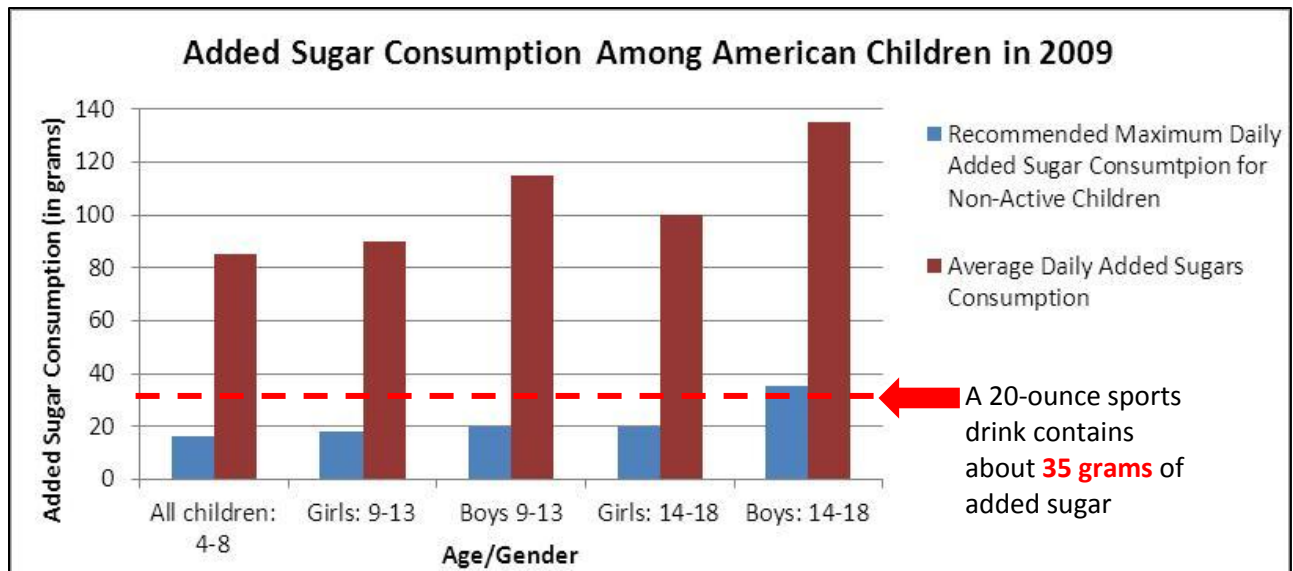
Sports Drinks Contribute to Excess Intake of Added Sugars

- Children today consume 4-6 times more added sugars than the maximum recommended daily amount; sports drinks and other sugary beverages weigh-in as the top source of those added sugars.⁶
- A 20-ounce sports drink contains 35 grams of added sugar, which by itself exceeds the American Heart Association's sugar limit for most children and adolescent girls (20 grams/day) and boys (33 grams/day).⁷ (See chart on page two)

Dispelling Myths

- Sports drinks are often marketed as healthier alternatives to soda and other soft drinks. However, depending on the brand, sports drinks can contain up to 19 grams of added sugar, 200 milligrams of sodium, and 80 calories per 8 ounces.⁸
- Sports drinks contain added sodium, which contributes to an already high-sodium diet for most children. For instance, a 20-oz. bottle of Gatorade contains approximately 275 mg of sodium. Because over 75% of children consume over the maximum allowance of 2,300 mg of sodium per day, even modest increases of sodium from sports drinks are harmful.⁹
- Frequent consumption of sugary drinks, such as sports drinks, can cause tooth decay. In addition, citric acid commonly found in sports drinks erodes tooth enamel.^{10,11}
- Among children and adolescents, intake of sugary sweetened beverages such as sports drinks has been shown to be negatively associated with intake of milk, as well as calcium, vitamin D, folate, and iron.^{12,13}

Sports Drinks in Schools: Do Kids Really Need Them?



BOTTOM LINE: Sports drinks are ONLY appropriate for marathon runners, triathletes, and other athletes engaged in sustained, vigorous physical activity. For school children, water is the best “sports drink.”

References

- Harris JL, Schwartz MB, Brownell KD, et al. Sugary Drink FACTS: Evaluating sugary drink nutrition and marketing to youth. 2011. Available from: http://www.sugarydrinkfacts.org/resources/SugaryDrinkFACTS_Report.pdf. Accessed July 11, 2012.
- Institute of Medicine (IOM). *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way toward Healthier Youth*. Washington, DC: IOM, 2007.
- American Academy of Pediatrics. “Clinical Report: Sports Drinks and Energy Drinks for Children and Adolescents: Are They Appropriate?” *Pediatrics* 2011, vol. 127(6), pp. 1182-1189.
- American Beverage Association (ABA). *Alliance School Beverage Guidelines Final Progress Report*. Washington, DC: ABA, 2010.
- Bridging the Gap. *Trends in Student Access to Competitive Venue Beverages: Findings from U.S. Secondary Schools*. In progress. <www.bridgingthegapresearch.org>.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 2010. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010.
- Johnson R, et al. “Dietary Sugars Intake and Cardiovascular Health: A Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association.” *Journal of the American Heart Association* 2009, vol. 120, pp. 1011-1020.
- Committee on Nutrition and the Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness. Sports drinks and energy drinks for children and adolescents: Are they appropriate? *Pediatrics*. 2011;127(6):1182–1189.
- Briefel R and Johnson C. “Secular Trends in Dietary Intake in the United States.” *Annual Review of Nutrition* 2004, vol. 24, pp. 401-431.
- Van Fraunhofer J, Rogers M. “Effects of Sports Drinks and Other Beverages on Dental Enamel.” *General Dentistry* 2005, vol. 53, pp. 28-31.
- Rees J, Loyn T, McAndrew R. “The Acidic and Erosive Potential of Five Sports Drinks.” *The European Journal of Prosthodontics and Restorative Dentistry* 2005, vol. 13, pp. 186-190
- Frary CD, Johnson RK, Wang MQ. Children and adolescents’ choices of foods and beverages high in added sugars are associated with intakes of key nutrients and food groups. *J Adolescent Health*. 2004;34(1):56–63.
- Keller KL, Kirzner J, Pietrobelli A, St-Onge M, Faith MS. Increased sweetened beverage intake is associated with reduced milk and calcium intake in 3- to 7-year-old children at multi-item laboratory lunches. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2009;109(3):497–501.

*This document was adapted from the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity fact sheet
“Sports Drinks in Schools: Game Over”*