

Top Healthy Drinks for Children



Highlights

- Water is the best drink for kids - it hydrates and protects teeth.
- Milk is essential for growth, especially in early years.
- Avoid sweetened, caffeinated, or acidic drinks.
- Fruit juice should be limited and never given to babies.
- Watch sugar content in packaged drinks - it's often very high.

In This Article

- Why Water Is the Best Choice
- The Role of Milk in a Child's Diet
- Drinks to Limit or Avoid
- How Much Sugar Is in Drinks?
- Tools And Assistance

Why Water Is the Best Choice

Children lose water all the time through their lungs, skin, urine, and faeces. Lost water is best replaced by tap water, which also helps protect teeth due to fluoride content. Water is the ideal drink for children.

The Role of Milk in a Child's Diet

Babies start life with milk. Breastfeeding is best, and formula should be used if breastfeeding isn't possible.

At around 6 months, you can introduce your baby to solid foods.

At about 12 months, you can introduce children to cow's milk. Full-fat milk is recommended up to the age of 2. The fat in regular milk provides the extra energy toddlers need during rapid growth.

Breastfeeding can continue, but there's no need to continue infant formula.

From about 12 months, you could use fortified rice or oat milk, but these drinks don't have enough protein and vitamin B12. Ensure your child gets these nutrients from other food sources like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, yoghurt, or cheese.

Avoid goat's milk, sheep's milk, coconut milk, and almond milk before the age of 2. Soy milk should also be avoided before age 2 unless recommended by a doctor, and it should be fortified.

Drinks to Limit or Avoid

Fruit Juice

Don't give babies fruit juice as it can interfere with their appetite for breast milk or formula. For toddlers, fruit juice can contribute to tooth decay, especially if consumed in bottles. For older children, pure fruit juice with no added sugar can be included occasionally. A serving of fruit juice is 125mL, equivalent to half a small juice box.

Sweetened Drinks

Drinks with added sugar should be avoided. These include soft drinks, cordial, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy drinks, and sports drinks. They increase the risk of children becoming overweight.

Caffeinated Drinks

Tea, coffee, cola, and energy drinks contain caffeine and are unsuitable for children. The caffeine dose in these drinks is high for children compared to adults and can disturb sleep and make children jittery.

How Much Sugar Is in Drinks?

A standard can of soft drink (375mL) can contain up to 40 to 44 grams of sugar, equivalent to 10 to 11 teaspoons. A bottle of sports drink (600mL) can have as much as 7 to 9 teaspoons of sugar. A cup of fruit drink (250mL) can have 6 ½ teaspoons of sugar, and the same amount of vitamin water (250mL) can have up to 3 ½ teaspoons of sugar. Sugary drinks and artificially sweetened drinks are acidic and can damage tooth enamel.

Tools And Assistance

Talk to your child's doctor or a qualified dietitian about drink choices.

If your child avoids milk, ask about ways to meet calcium, protein, and B12 needs.

Use daily meal planners or hydration charts to help monitor intake.

Consider using child-friendly cups or fun straws to encourage healthy drinking habits.