

CASA Conversations



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Nutrition: Rethink Your Drink

Introduction

Learning about food choice is an important part of nutrition education – however, we know that foster youth may have very little control over what they are fed in their placements.

The goal is to educate youth, encourage healthy choices, but do so in a thoughtful way. We certainly don't want to set young people up to ask for something they cannot have. Kids can, however, choose to drink water instead of sugary beverages.

Water is something we all can choose.

The Facts

Sugary beverages alone can significantly endanger the health of children and teens.

Did you know?

- Every day in California, an average of 41% of children ages 2-11 and 62% of adolescents ages 12-17 drink at least one soda or other beverage sweetened with sugar.
- U.S. teens drink twice as much soda as milk.
- A child's risk of becoming obese increases on average by 60% with each additional serving of soda per day.
- Drinking soda almost doubles the risk of tooth decay and cavities in children. The acid from soda erodes tooth enamel, and the sugar feeds bacteria that cause tooth decay.

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Drinking water, on the other hand, has immediate benefits.

- Water is the easiest and most effective way to get hydrated.
- 55-75% of our bodies are made up of water.
- We need water to digest our food. It's also the main ingredient in sweat, and makes up a lot of our pee and poo.
- Water helps us maintain our blood, muscle, body fat, and bones. Every cell of our bodies depends on water to function normally.

Added sugar has many aliases. Check labels for any of the following:

- **Barley malt**
- **High fructose corn syrup**
- **Brown Sugar**
- **Honey**
- **Cane juice**
- **Maltodextrin**
- **Corn syrup**
- **Maple syrup**
- **Dextrose**
- **Molasses**
- **Fructose**
- **Powered sugar**
- **Glucose**
- **Raw sugar**
- **Sucrose**

Starting a CASA Conversation

First, it's important to find out if your CASA child drinks water how she feels about it. Does she like drinking it? Can she swap in water once a day? Does her caregiver encourage her to drink more water, and if so, is she receptive to it? If not, might the caregiver be willing to promote hydration at home?

Perhaps the most natural way to strike up a conversation about choosing water and other drinks without added sugar is to drink water in front of your CASA child and share your own appreciation for it.

If you find that your child is not very keen on drinking water, find out why. Chances are they find it a boring alternative to soda, Gatorade, and other sugar-packed drinks. Below are some strategies and activities you can use to get your youth thirsty for water:

- Make water more exciting by adding slices of lemon, lime, cucumber, or watermelon. Ask the youth about which fruits (or fruit flavors) she loves, and then make her a special "spa water" infused with her favorites.
 - If you have access to a community kitchen, you can even make this together! Otherwise, spa water is a great, refreshing drink to bring along on a trip to the park.

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- Add bubbles! Kids who love soda may be more willing to try and/or enjoy carbonated water.
- Add a splash of 100% juice to plain sparkling water for a refreshing, low-calorie drink.
- When you do opt for a sugar-sweetened beverage, go for the small size. Some companies are now selling 8oz. cans and bottles of soda, which contain about 100 calories.
- Be a role model for your CASA youth by choosing healthy, low-calorie beverages.
- At a restaurant, order water instead of or in addition to another drink, and then challenge one another to drink more of the water.
- If you're working with a younger child, you can explore Potter the Otter who likes to drink water <http://www.potterloveswater.com/>
- Get scientific! Do an experiment together.
 - On nutrition labels, sugar is measured in grams, which can be hard to wrap our minds around. You can demonstrate just how much sugar is in soda, fruit drinks, sports drinks, and other beverages with the help of some sugar cubes and simple math. One gram is 4 teaspoons of sugar, and each sugar cube is one teaspoon. Enlist your CASA child to do the math and place a serving's worth of sugar cubes next to each drink. This is a great way to start a conversation about the high levels of sugar hidden in these drinks. Plus, it's good math practice!

Pitfalls to Avoid

Don't try to guilt your CASA youth into making healthy choices. Celebrate when he chooses water, but if he wants to drink something else, don't give him a hard time about it.

Remember that eating and food can be bound up in our memories, relationships, and feelings. Soda may be one of the youth's few creature comforts, or something he can share with his foster or biological parent. Be sensitive to this.

Don't lose sight of the advocacy. We want our youth to make healthy choices, but the importance of water pales in comparison to something like kicking a drug addiction. Often those in recovery develop other dependencies on things like caffeine or nicotine.

If your youth is leading a sober life and drinking cola is helping him maintain this, maybe it isn't the best time to bring up switching to water.

In short, be sensitive to the youth's individual circumstances, and tailor your conversations accordingly.

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Additional Resources

Sugar-Sweetened Beverages: Extra Calories, and Extra Weight
California Center for Public Health Advocacy, November 2009.

http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/PDFs/Soda_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Rethink Your Drink: Quench your thirst without the sugar - Kaiser Permanente, 2011

<http://tinyurl.com/7qnfg7o>

Kick the Can, California Center for Public Health Advocacy

<http://www.kickthecan.info/>

Healthy Beverages Community Action Kit, Indian Health Services, September 2006

www.ihs.gov/nutrition/documents/HealthyBeverages.doc

Re-Think Your Drink: 'Be Sugar Savvy' Activities

Champions for Change: Network for a Healthy California

<http://sfgov3.org/ftp/uploadedfiles/shapeupsf/projects/UpdatedSugarSavvy.pdf>

Why Drinking Water is the Way to Go - Kids Health

http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/water.html

Potter Loves Water - First Five, Santa Clara County

<http://www.potterloveswater.com/>

Healthy Drinks - Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-drinks/>

