

# Hydration



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## How much fluid do children need?

The amount of fluid a child needs depends on many factors including their age, their gender, the weather and how much physical activity they do, but generally they should aim to drink about 6-8 glasses of fluid per day (on top of the water provided by food in their diet). Younger children need relatively smaller drinks (e.g. 120–150 ml serving) and older children need larger drinks (e.g. 250–300 ml serving).

## What are the best drinks for children?

Water and milk are the best drinks for children as they do not contain free sugars. Free sugars contribute to calorie intakes and higher consumption of sugary drinks has been associated with weight gain in children. Some drinks like milk and fruit juice provide vitamins and minerals. In the case of fruit juice this also contains free sugars and so it shouldn't be consumed in large amounts.

Drinking **sugary drinks** too often can also lead to tooth decay, especially if consumed frequently between meals or if teeth are not brushed regularly with fluoride toothpaste. Some drinks are acidic (e.g. fruit juice, squash and some carbonated drinks) and this may cause dental erosion (damage to tooth enamel) if they are drunk often.

**Water** - a good choice throughout the day because it hydrates without providing extra calories or risking harm to teeth.



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**Milk** is a useful source of nutrients, especially protein, B vitamins, iodine and calcium. Most children should drink reduced-fat milks. Unsweetened, calcium fortified dairy alternatives can also be included. Milky drinks containing added sugars such as milkshakes, hot chocolate and malted drinks should only be drunk occasionally.

**Fruit and vegetable juices and smoothies** provide some vitamins and minerals. However, they also contain free sugars and can be acidic, so it's recommended to limit them to a combined total of one small glass (150ml) a day and to keep them to mealtimes. 150ml counts as a maximum of 1 portion of 5 A DAY. They can be diluted with water to reduce acidity and sugars content.

**Sugar-free drinks** hydrate without adding extra sugars but it's a good idea for most drinks to be milk or water to avoid getting an increased taste for sweet drinks. Fizzy drinks can contain acids that can erode the outer surface of the tooth. Be aware that some of these drinks contain caffeine.

**Sugary drinks** are best avoided as they provide sugars and few nutrients. Fizzy drinks can contain acids that can erode the outer surface of the tooth. Be aware that some of these drinks contain caffeine.

**Sports and energy drinks** can be high in sugars and energy drinks may contain high levels of caffeine or other stimulants. These drinks are **not** suitable for young children.

## Practical tips to keep children hydrated:

- Ensure children have a drink before school i.e. with breakfast, and during breaks/playtime.
- Parents, teachers and guardians should offer drinks regularly, especially in hot weather. Encourage regular drink breaks throughout the day.
- Remember that many foods have a high-water content and can also contribute to fluid intake. i.e. fruit, vegetables, soup, yogurt.
- Always pack a water bottle in a school bag or lunchbox for children heading off to school/outings/other activities.
- Make water appealing to children by adding in citrus fruit such as limes, lemons, fresh herbs.