

## Script – Print – Ditch the soda: Healthy hydration starts young

It's no surprise that kids love sugary drinks. It's also no shock that a group of health organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the American Heart Association, have released [new recommendations](#) encouraging healthier hydration options for children.

The bottom line, according to experts, is kids and teenagers should drink water and cow's milk and stay clear of drinks that contain added sugar, artificial sweeteners and caffeine.

Mohammad Soud, MD, a pediatrician with OSF HealthCare, says while the recommendations aren't new revelations, it's an important message to drive home. "Our markets are infiltrated with a lot of drinks that seem to be popular and harmless," says Dr. Soud. "However, these drinks carry a lot of issues when it comes to kids' health. They are overloaded with caffeine and other stimulants, and caffeine can have a lot of adverse effects on both the cardiovascular and nervous system."

Dr. Soud says caffeine drinks can cause high blood pressure, heart palpitations, anxiety, depression and interrupted sleep – all of which can affect academic performance. Sugar can also severely impact children's health, contributing to Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

"There is mounting evidence that these artificial sweeteners are linked to certain types of cancers, like breast cancer," adds Dr. Soud. "Artificial sweeteners can also alter the gut bacteria."

Perhaps the biggest surprise from the new recommendations might be that cow's milk is the choice over plant-based milk. "We get lots of questions from parents about plant-based milk, almond milk, oat milk, soy milk and rice milk," says Dr. Soud. "Those are missing a lot of nutrients compared to cow's milk."

Cow's milk contains high-quality protein, essential amino acids and plenty of vitamin D, calcium, phosphorus and iodine, which are important for bone growth and brain development in children. But soy milk has been approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics as an alternative to cow's milk for children who have dairy allergies.

Water should be the go-to drink every day, says Dr. Soud. How much water, however, depends on the age, activities they participate in and the climate they live in.

- 40 fl oz per day for 5—8-year-olds
- 61 fl oz per day for 9—13-year-olds
- 88 fl oz per day for 14—18-year-olds

But it's unrealistic to think kids won't reach for something unhealthy from time to time. Dr. Soud's message to his patients and parents is simple — stick with water and cow's milk first. But on occasions like weekends or special events, it's OK to opt for a smoothie, fruit punch or a sports drink. Being flexible, he says, is the key.

"I encourage parents to read labels with their kids and teach them how to read labels," says Dr. Soud. "Any drink that has high sugar, this is what I call a sometimes drink. This is not an everyday drink. I tell parents to be role models for their kids. So when they are drinking water over soda, often kids mimic that behavior."

Dr. Soud says establishing good hydrating habits will serve children and teens well into adulthood. "We all want our kids to grow up with healthy habits, and hydration is an important part of a balanced diet," he says. "You've probably heard the saying that you are what you eat. That applies to what you drink too. The rule is sip smart, water first, milk next and skip the rest."