

## Putting a Limit on Sugar Sweetened Beverages

Picture this: You sit down at your kitchen table, open the sugar bowl, and spoon 10 teaspoons of the white stuff into a bowl...and then you eat it. As silly as it is to imagine this scenario, the fact is that every time you or your child downs a regular can of soda, you are consuming 10 teaspoons of sugar! Make that a 20 ounce bottle and that figure almost doubles! Because liquid beverages don't make us feel full like food does, they are often overlooked. However, these highly sweetened concoctions can contribute hundreds of calories per day to a child's diet, not to mention excess fat and caffeine. In fact, drinking just 2 cans of regular soda every day for one year can translate into a 29 pound weight gain! Cutting back on sugary drinks and replacing them with healthier substitutions is one dietary change that is definitely worth making.

While soda often gets a bad rap, there are other beverages out there that may appear healthy but fall short nutritionally. For example, juice boxes, while convenient, are not always healthy or low in sugar. Vitamin waters often contain calories from added sugars and energy drinks can have more caffeine than colas do. Other popular beverages such as flavored milk jugs and gourmet coffee drinks often contain whole milk and may be topped with whipped cream, contributing a lot of extra fat and calories. While these beverages are fine in moderation, the majority of our children's fluid intake should be from water and nonfat/low-fat milk (after age 2). 100% fruit juice, while full of vitamins and minerals, does contain sugar and calories, and therefore should be limited to 4-6 ounces for children ages 1 to 6, and 8-12 ounces for those ages 7 to 18.

Making an immediate switch to healthier beverages is probably unrealistic for most families. Here are some tips to help you approach these changes gradually.

- Start stocking the refrigerator with no-calorie or low-calorie drinks such as flavored waters.
- Dilute servings of 100% fruit juice with plain water or seltzer.
- Make nonfat/ low-fat milk or water the only mealtime beverage choices.
- Use no-calorie sugar substitutes when making lemonade and punch.
- Keep lemon and lime slices on hand to flavor plain water.

Here at school food service, we do not serve anything other than 100% juices, low-fat and non-fat milk and water. By doing the same at home, you can help eliminate unwanted calories, sugar, and caffeine from your child's diet and make more room for healthy, nutritious foods and beverages.

