

EXTENSION CONNECTION - Fruit Juice - How Much Is Too Much?

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Q. Isn't fruit juice good for children? Does it matter how much they drink?

A. Nutrition experts encourage families to limit a child's intake of soda and sugary beverages. But is fruit juice included in the list of limited beverages? Some experts believe that fruit juice needs to be limited; noting that drinking too much juice can contribute to obesity, cavities (dental caries), diarrhea, and other gastrointestinal problems.

Another problem with drinking too much juice is that it is filling and will decrease a child's appetite for more nutritious foods. Fruit juices generally do not have a lot of nutrients, although they do have Vitamin C and some are fortified with calcium. Also, if your child is drinking a lot of juice, then he probably is not drinking much milk, which is a good source of calcium and other nutrients.

Q. My child really likes juice and it is difficult to get him to drink anything else. What should I do?

A. How do you prevent problems from drinking too much juice? One easy way is to not introduce juice until your child is six months old. And when you do begin to offer your infant juice, give it in a cup and not a bottle.

Older infants and toddlers generally drink too much juice when they always have a sippy cup in their hands, or if they are sucking on the cup like they would a bottle. Although sippy cups are convenient and it is nice to prevent messes, if your child always has one in his hands, then he is probably most at risk of getting cavities, since his teeth will always have sugar on them. To prevent your child's cups from becoming a security object for toddlers, it can help to restrict them to meals, when you offer milk, and snacks.

Q. Does Your Child Have a Problem With Juice?

A. In general, if you child is eating a well balanced diet, including some fresh fruits and vegetables, is drinking 16-24 ounces a day of milk and dairy products, and doesn't have problems with cavities or being overweight, then he likely doesn't have a juice problem.

If your child is a picky eater, has a poorly balanced diet, cavities, diarrhea, and chronic abdominal pain or if he is overweight, then you should consider limiting juice. You should definitely avoid letting your child fall asleep with a bottle or cup of juice, since that is probably the biggest risk

factor for getting cavities. Also avoid giving 'fruit' drinks or 'fruit' sodas, since they may actually have very little fruit in them.

Q. Are there benefits to drinking juice?

A. After all of this talk about juice, is there any reason to give your child juice? Many kids do not like eating fruit, so offering fruit juice is one way to get your child the 2 (for younger kids) to 4 servings (older kids) of fruit that is recommended. A 6 ounce glass of 100% fruit juice can substitute for (but is not really equal to) one serving of fruit.

Still, it is important to remember that the recommended servings of fruit juice are actually limits. Your child does not need to drink any fruit juice, especially if he is getting the recommended servings of fruit by eating whole fruit.

Points to remember about Juice and Children

- When you give your child juice, it should be 100% fruit juice and not fruit drinks.
- Infants under 6 months of age should not be given juice.
- Younger children aged 1 to 6 years should have only 4-6 ounces of juice a day.
- Older children should be limited to 8 ounces of juice a day.
- Instead of juice, children should be encouraged to eat whole fruits.

Call me at the Webster County Extension Office, 515-576-2119, or E-mail pgilbert@iastate.edu, with your nutrition and health questions. You may also call our toll-free ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804 or visit the Webster County Extension web site: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/webster>.