

Sports Drinks and Energy Drinks for Children and Adolescents: Are they appropriate?

Sports and energy drinks are a large and growing beverage industry now marketed to children and adolescents for a variety of uses.

Sports drinks are different products than energy drinks; sports drinks are flavored beverages that often contain carbohydrates, minerals, electrolytes and sometimes vitamins and other nutrients. Energy drinks typically contain stimulants, such as caffeine and guarana, with varying amount of carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Children and adolescents should be taught to drink water routinely as an initial beverage of choice along with healthy balanced diet. All electrolyte, carbohydrate, protein and mineral requirements are usually obtained from a well-balanced diet.

Interestingly, most adolescents did not differentiate between sports and energy drinks. Using energy drinks for rehydration can result in ingestion of potentially large amounts of caffeine or other stimulants and cause increased anxiety and possible arrhythmias.

Dental erosions from sports and energy drinks are of concern as well.

Current recommendations for schools include:

Limit sugars with food and drinks; Have water available at no cost; Restrict carbonated, flavored, fortified waters; Restrict use of sports drinks only by athletes during prolonged and vigorous activities; Prohibit use of energy drinks and sale of caffeinated products in school.

Routine ingestion of carbohydrate-containing sports drinks should be avoided, since significantly increased risk of overweight, obesity and dental erosion.

Each parent should promote use of water as a principal source of hydration for children.