

Juice: To Drink or Not to Drink

presented by the Salem Evening News

“Can too much fruit juice cause a child to gain weight?” “Are all juices created equal?” “Does fruit juice provide the same nutrition as the whole fruit?” “How much is too much to give a toddler?” These are just some of the questions that I hear involving fruit juice and children.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics children are the largest juice consumers in the US, drinking 28 percent of all the juice purchased. And while fruit juices may indeed be fat free and cholesterol free, fruit juice is also one of the leading sources of added sugars in the American diet.

Health professionals can't confirm whether excess juice consumption is linked to excess body weight or failure to thrive in children, but it is still a good idea to take a look at how much juice your child is drinking each day and decide if you need to make any changes.

First of all, be sure you know what's in your drink. While fruit juice can indeed be a healthy part of a balanced diet, all juices are not created equal. There are an increasing number of juice drink “blends” on the market, with wholesome looking pictures of fruit on the label and names that sound as though they're the elixir of health. In reality many of these are little more than sugar flavored water with a few added vitamins.

Read the label, especially the fine print, to know just what you're getting. Look for “100% juice”, and steer clear of anything that can't make that claim. Fruit cocktails, fruit blends, fruit drinks and fruit punches all contain added sugar in various forms; look for key words such as sugar, corn syrup, fructose or dextrose to tell you if sweeteners have been added.

Once you're sure that you've only got 100 percent juice in the house, look at just how much junior is drinking, as fruit juice (even 100 percent fruit juice) doesn't have the same nutrition as piece of fruit. To begin with, fruit juice has more calories per serving than the whole fruit. In fact, many of the juice cocktails and punches actually have more calories, ounce per ounce, than soda.

For children who are overweight, it is better to encourage them to eat their fruit rather than drink it in order to limit calories. For example, 8 oz of orange juice has 110 calories while a medium sized orange has about 60 calories. Eating whole fruit will also be more likely to fill



you up than drinking juice, as whole fruit packs some fiber while juice has zip. Your fruity libation may be missing valuable phytochemicals as well, for these are often found in the skin and pulp of a fruit, and may be lost in the juice process.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that juice not be given to children under six months because it may replace more nutrition choices such as breast milk or formula. Children ages 1 to 6 should consume no more than 4 to 6 ounces daily, or 1 serving of fruit from juice. Children ages 7 to 18 years should drink no more than 8 to 12 oz daily, or no more than 2 of the recommended 3-4 servings of fruit per day.

Instead of letting your children reach for the juice bottle whenever they're thirsty try limiting juice to meals and snacks, encouraging them to drink water at other times. If your child is reluctant to change his or her juice guzzling habits, you may want to try diluting the juice with double amount of water to help cut calories while still retaining some of the sweetness.

Be sure, too, that juice is pasteurized in order to minimize the risk of contamination with Salmonella bacteria. Encouraging children to reach for water instead of a sugary beverage when they're thirsty will help to establish healthy habits, and may help reduce the amount of fruit drinks and soda that they reach for as teens.