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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Sports drinks vs. energy drinks vs. plain water: What's best for thirsty kids?

While sports drinks can be helpful after high-intensity exercise, energy drinks for kids should be crossed off the family grocery list.

Tasty drinks that replenish lost fluids after sports or claim to boost energy may seem like the best choice for children, and they are widely consumed. But a new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) explains that sports and energy drinks are vastly different.

Sports drinks are flavored beverages often containing carbohydrates, minerals and electrolytes (salts), and sometimes vitamins or other nutrients. On the other hand, energy drinks contain stimulants, with caffeine as the primary source of "energy," along with varying amounts of other ingredients.

Let's say your child takes part in an hour-long soccer game in the sweltering heat. A sports drink might be appropriate to quickly replenish fluids lost through sweating and exercise. But drinking too many sugar-filled, carbohydrate-containing sports drinks can increase the risk for obesity and dental decay. Plus, there is no advantage to consuming the vitamins and minerals advertised in these drinks because they are easily obtained in a well-balanced diet, the AAP says.

And while everyone may feel they need a pick-me-up, energy drinks have no place in the diets of children and adolescents, the AAP warns. Excessive amounts of caffeine

can affect the appropriate balance of carbohydrate, fat and protein intakes that children need for optimal growth, development, body composition and health.

Too much caffeine also can increase heart rate, blood pressure, speech rate and motor activity, and play a role in triggering irregular heartbeat or abnormal heart rhythm, among other concerns.

Some energy drinks pack more than 500 milligrams of caffeine, enough to result in caffeine toxicity. By comparison, soft drinks contain about 24 milligrams of caffeine per serving.

For most children engaged in routine physical activities, AAP experts say, the beverage of choice should be plain water.



—Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff

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