

Are Sports Drinks the Best Choice for My Child?

Introduction

Food shopping for one's children can be a stressful experience. This can be especially true when it comes to purchasing drinks. With so many options to choose from, it can be difficult to determine which products are healthy and safe. Multi-million-dollar advertising campaigns promote these products to teens and adolescents as healthy. However, do these drinks truly provide the benefits that they claim to offer? Or could they be causing more harm than good? Let's find out!

Sports Drinks



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Below are some of the general characteristics of standard sports drinks such as Gatorade and Powerade:

- Contain added sugars for rapid energy (~34g per 20oz bottle) (1).
- Contain electrolytes such as sodium and potassium to replenish those lost in sweat.

On the surface, these drinks may seem like an ideal choice for student athletes. Yet, there remain some concerns surrounding the overuse of these drinks. Higher consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages has been associated with negative health outcomes, including:

- Heart disease (2).
- High blood pressure (3).
- Dental caries (i.e. cavities) (4).

The American Heart Association recommends children and adolescents 2 to 18-years old do not consume more than 25g of added sugars each day (5).

The electrolytes contained within these drinks may not be necessary for young athletes. Children have been shown to sweat less than adults, as their bodies dissipate heat in other ways (6,7). As such, they do not need to replenish as many electrolytes during activity. Sipping water throughout exercise is generally enough to maintain proper hydration. For prolonged exercise during high heat or humidity, a sports drink can be a suitable option (8).

Sports Drink Alternatives

Sports drink alternatives such as PRIME Hydration are becoming more prevalent as well. These drinks tote high doses of vitamins while not containing added sugars. However, more vitamins are not always better. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established Tolerable Upper Intake Levels (ULs) for several vitamins and minerals. Consuming a nutrient in excess of these limits can be harmful to one's health.

Upper Limits for Supplemental Vitamin A Consumption by Age (9)	
Age Range	Upper Limit (mcg)
Birth – 3 years	600
Children 4 – 8 years	900
Children 9 – 13 years	1,700
Teens 14 – 18 years	2,800

One bottle of PRIME Hydration contains 900 mcg of vitamin A. As such, this product is not well suited for young children. This is especially true for children consuming other forms of vitamin supplements. For more information on vitamin A, click [here](#).

PRIME Hydration may also have dangerous levels of PFAS in some of their products. These are chemicals which may contaminate food during the manufacturing process (10). According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), high exposure to PFAS may contribute to (10):

- Developmental delays and hormonal disruptions
- Increased cancer risk
- Impaired immune function

An ongoing [class-action lawsuit](#) against PRIME alleges that some products may contain “approximately three times the recommended lifetime health advisory [of PFAS] for drinking water” (11). If the allegations are true, this product may pose health risks to children and adults alike.

How to Fuel for Activity

There are superior options to sports drinks for fueling before exercise. Snacks providing a balance of protein, carbohydrates, and fats contribute to sustained energy. Examples of pre-activity snacks can include:

- Whole wheat crackers or bread with peanut butter
- A piece of fruit with a glass of low-fat milk
- Low-fat yogurt with granola and berries

Teen Drink Usage & Marketing



Image by [BiljaST](#) on Pixabay.

In 2021, >50% of high school students reported consuming a sports drink in the previous week (12). This indicates that the consumption of these drinks is widespread. Many brands heavily employ social media marketing to target teens and adolescents. Brands like PRIME are promoted by famous influencers such as

Logan Paul and KSI. With a combined following of over 40 million on Instagram alone, they reach a very wide audience.

While influencers can be entertaining, they are often not experts in nutrition. Dietitians are credentialed in the field and have mandatory continuing education. As such, they are a more reliable resource for evidence-based nutrition information. To find a dietitian in your area, click [here](#).

Additional Resources

1. [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Find a Nutrition Expert](#)
2. [Eat Right to Play Hard](#)
3. [8 Gameday Nutrition Tips for Young Athletes](#)

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