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Children's Drink FACTS

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Background

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Heart Association warn that sugary drink consumption threatens children's health and policy strategies to reduce sugary drink consumption are "urgently needed."¹ Sugary drinks contribute almost one-half of added sugars consumed by children,² and fruit drinks (fruit-flavored drinks with added sugars) are the most common type of sugary drink for young children.^{3,4} Overconsumption of 100% juice by children also raises concerns.^{5,6} Health and nutrition experts recommend that children should not consume any drinks with added sugars or low-calorie sweeteners, and that caregivers limit children's consumption of 100% juice.

The research

Rudd Center researchers assessed the sales, nutrition, and marketing of children's drinks, defined as drinks that companies market as intended for children to consume (in marketing to parents and/or directly to children). Utilizing the same methods as previous FACTS reports, researchers collected data on the nutrition content and on-package marketing of children's drinks by category, company, and brand. We report advertising spending in all media (including TV, magazines, and digital) and exposure to TV advertising by preschoolers (2-5 years) and children (6-11 years) using syndicated market research data, and assess changes in the past five years when possible. We also identified children's drinks that met expert recommendations for healthier beverage choices for children.

Results

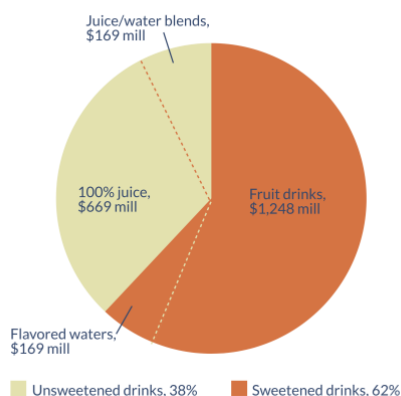
Researchers identified and analyzed children's drinks offered by 23 drink brands that had at least \$10 million in sales in 2018. The analysis included 34 sweetened children's drinks (fruit drinks, flavored waters, and drink mixes) and 33 drinks without added sweeteners (100% juice, juice/water blends, and one sparkling water).

Children's drink nutrition

Sweetened fruit drinks and flavored waters

- 65% contained added sugars and 74% contained low-calorie sweeteners; 38% contained both types of sweeteners.
- Two-thirds did not contain any juice, and the majority of products with juice contained just 5%.
- One serving of many of the highest-selling fruit drink brands (such as Capri Sun Juice Drink, Hawaiian Punch, Sunny D, and Minute Maid Lemonade) had more than 50% of the recommended amount of daily added sugars for children (i.e., >12.5g).

Children's drink sales in 2018: \$2.2 billion



Due to the added sugars and low-calorie sweeteners in sweetened children's drinks, none of them met expert recommendations for drinks that should be served to children under 14 years old.

“Beverage companies continue to market sugar-sweetened drinks directly to young children on TV and through packages designed to get their attention in the store,” said Jennifer Harris, PhD, MBA, lead study author and director of Marketing Initiatives at the Rudd Center.

100% juice and juice/water blends

- The nutrition content of 100% juice products did not vary widely (total sugar of 3-4 g/oz) as the only ingredients were fruit juice or fruit juice concentrate and water.
- Most 100% juice products that came in single-serving boxes or pouches contained more than 4 ounces, which is the maximum recommended daily amount of juice for toddlers (1-3 years).
- Some juice boxes and pouches contained more than 6 ounces of juice, the maximum daily amount recommended for preschoolers (4-6 years).
- Juice/water blend products were the healthiest children’s drinks. They consisted of juice and water with no added sugars or low-calorie sweeteners, and they were lower in calories and total sugars than 100% juice.

Marketing of children’s drinks

Similar claims and branding on packages of sweetened children’s drinks and drinks without added sweeteners may confuse consumers about the ingredients in these drinks.

- Images of fruit appeared on 85% of children’s sweetened drink packages (regardless of whether the product contained any fruit juice); claims about low sugar content and Vitamin C were also prevalent.
- Brands that offered both sweetened drinks and drinks without added sweeteners (including Apple & Eve, Capri Sun, and Mott’s) used similar-looking packages, flavor names, fruit images, and claims for all their products.
- Information about percent juice (with the exception of 100% juice) and types of sweeteners contained in children’s drink products were only available on the nutrition facts panel on the back of the package.
- Consumers would need to know the chemical names of low-calorie sweeteners (i.e., sucralose, acesulfame potassium, neotame, and stevia) to determine that their child’s drink contained these ingredients.

TV AD EXPOSURE IN 2018

Children (ages 2-11) saw:

- More than **2X as many ads** for sweetened drinks than for drinks without added sweeteners
- More than **4X as many ads** for sweetened children’s drinks than adults

Sweetened children’s drink brands continue to advertise directly to children

- Sweetened children’s drinks spent more to advertise on TV than children’s drinks without added sweeteners (\$18.5 vs. \$13.6 million).
- Kraft Heinz advertised two sweetened drinks—Kool-Aid Jammers and Capri Sun Roarin’ Waters—directly to children on children’s TV programming.
- According to the Children’s Food & Beverage Advertising Initiative industry self-regulatory program, these drinks are exempt from meeting nutrition standards for products that can be advertised in child-directed media because they have 30 calories. However, they contained both added sugars and low-calorie sweeteners.

Targeted marketing to Hispanic and Black children raises additional concerns

- Sunny D and Capri Sun were the only brands to advertise on Spanish-language TV, where they devoted a significant amount (25%) of their TV advertising.
- Minute Maid appeared to target Black children and parents with advertising for children’s drinks, including Minute Maid Lemonade fruit drink.

“You shouldn’t have to be a nutritionist to figure out whether or not a product is healthy for your child,” said Maria Romo-Palafox, PhD, RD, study author and assistant professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at Saint Louis University.

Recommendations

Improvements in the marketing of children’s drinks would help parents identify healthier children’s drinks and reduce sugary drink consumption by children:

- Beverage manufacturers should clearly indicate on the front of children’s drink packages that a product contains added sugars and/or low-calorie sweeteners and the percent juice content.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration could require that products with nutrition-related claims on packages meet minimum nutrition standards and prohibit the use of fruit and vegetable images on drink product packages that contain little or no juice.
- The Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative should establish nutrition standards that align with health expert recommendations. Specifically, drinks with added sugars and/or low-calorie sweeteners should not be advertised directly to children.
- All media companies should follow the lead of Disney and Sesame Street and set nutrition standards for products than can license their characters on products for children.
- State and local governments should increase the price of sugary drinks, including fruit drinks and flavored waters, through an excise tax.

For the full report, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org/childrensdrinkfacts

References

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The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a multi-disciplinary research center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy.

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