



# Infant and Toddler Beverage Recommendations for the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

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## BACKGROUND

Reduction of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption – and replacement with healthy beverages such as water and milk -- is key to children’s health.

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)\* are the largest single source of added sugars in children’s diets and among the top sources of calories.<sup>1</sup>

The added sugars and ‘empty’ calories\*\* in SSBs set the stage for excessive weight gain and chronic health problems later in life.

It is well established that SSBs are uniquely harmful to health. SSBs are causally linked to obesity, type 2 diabetes, dental decay, heart disease (stroke, cardiovascular disease), metabolic syndrome (insulin resistance, hypertension, dyslipidemia) and fatty liver disease.

\*Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are sugary drinks such as sodas, fruit drinks, punches, energy drinks, sports drinks, and pre-sweetened coffee and tea drinks.

\*\*Empty calories are those that come with few, if any, nutrients.

## What is the Problem?

By age 2 years, one-third of children are already routinely consume sugar-sweetened beverages, and a sizable minority of young children drink no water at all on a given day.

Table 1: Percentage of children consuming beverage type on a given day, by age

Beverage	0-6 months	6-12 months	12-24 months	2-5 years
Breastmilk	42%	24%	--	--
Formula	74%	79%	--	--
Milk	--	--	84%	83%
Water	19%	61%	70%	65%
100% juice	--	38%	57%	40%
Sugar-sweetened beverages	--	5%	32%	44%

Sources:

Grimes CA, Szymlek-Gay EA, Nicklas TA. Beverage Consumption among U.S. Children Aged 0–24 Months: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). *Nutrients*. 2017; 9(3):264.  
Moshfegh, AJ, Garceau AO, Parker EA, and Clemens JC. Beverage Choices among Children: What We Eat in America, NHANES 2015-2016. Food Surveys Research Group Data Brief No. 22. May 2019.

## Why does infant and toddler nutrition matter?

- Infant and toddler nutrition is crucial for brain and physical development
- Children’s taste preferences and habits are formed early in life

## How does infant and toddler nutrition relate to the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans?

- For the first time, the Dietary Guidelines will include dietary advice for children from birth to 24 months
- Parents tend to be most receptive to nutrition instruction when their children are young
- Beverages are a critical component in the diets of young children
- The Dietary Guidelines should include clear and consistent recommendations for infant and toddler beverages



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## What are the impacts?

- Nearly 20% of U.S. children and nearly 40% of U.S. adults are obese
  - The U.S. is among the most obese nations in the world
  - Overweight is the primary disqualifier for fitness to serve in the U.S. military
- Diabetes rates are at an all-time high
  - About 10% of adults in the U.S. have been diagnosed with diabetes
  - An estimated 18% of adolescents are pre-diabetic, a previously rare condition in childhood
- Vulnerable populations – Latinx, African-Americans, and Native Americans – experience higher rates of the adverse health consequences of SSB consumption; nearly double, in some cases
- SSB-related diseases are a significant burden to the nation, both in terms of health care costs and in reduced human capital

**Recommendation:** Sugar-sweetened beverages have no place in young children’s diets – make water first for thirst by emphasizing water in the Dietary Guidelines and accompanying public-facing educational materials

Table 2: Expert recommendations for the beverages that young children should be drinking

Age	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Healthy Eating Research Expert Panels	American Academy of Pediatrics
0-6 Months	Breastmilk / Formula	Breastmilk / Formula
6-12 Months	Breastmilk / Formula	Breastmilk / Formula
	Introduce water in a cup 4-8 oz/day	Introduce water
12-24 Months	Breastmilk / Whole milk / 2% fat milk 4 oz x 4 times/day	Whole milk
	Water	Water
	Avoid 100% fruit juice	100% fruit juice Maximum 4 oz daily
2-5 Years	Milk 0-1% fat, unflavored 16-20 oz/day total; maximum 8 oz/serving	Milk 0-2% fat 16-24 oz/day total
	Water	Encourage water throughout the day
	100% fruit juice Maximum 4 oz daily	100% fruit juice Maximum 4-6 oz daily

Sources:

Pérez-Escamilla 2017, Feeding Guidelines for Infants and Young Toddlers: A Responsive Parenting Approach

<http://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/feeding-guidelines-for-infants-and-young-toddlers-a-responsive-parenting-approach/>

Healthier Beverage Recommendations, Healthy Eating Research 2013

<http://healthyeatingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/HER-Healthier-Bev-Rec-FINAL-3-25-13.pdf>

Hagan 2017, Bright Futures, Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents, American Academy of Pediatrics

[https://brightfutures.aap.org/Bright%20Futures%20Documents/BF4\\_POCKETGUIDE.pdf](https://brightfutures.aap.org/Bright%20Futures%20Documents/BF4_POCKETGUIDE.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Version with full citations available upon request to [dwalliance@ucanr.edu](mailto:dwalliance@ucanr.edu). This policy brief was funded by the WK Kellogg Foundation.