

# KIDS AND HYDRATION: *Selecting Beverages for Active Kids*



When your child opens the refrigerator door or surveys the supermarket shelf to grab a drink to tote to soccer practice or for an afternoon of rollerblading or biking, what choices does he/she have?

The beverages that parents put in the fridge matter, especially when rehydrating active children. By the time most active children become thirsty, they have lost important fluids and electrolytes (sodium and potassium), and may already be dehydrated. So it's important to think about the most suitable beverages for active children before they drink.

## **How Much Do You Know About H<sub>2</sub>O?**

Water is an OK beverage, especially when nothing else is available. However, water has its limitations. It does not provide energy, which may be needed if a child is running and playing all day. Children will also stop drinking water before their fluid needs are met. Often this is because water lacks the taste appeal of a lightly flavoured beverage. If given a choice, kids will drink much more of a flavoured beverage than of a glass of water. As a result, recent studies have shown that if given water, kids may not drink enough to prevent dehydration.

## **Know The Score About Sports Drinks**

A properly formulated sports drink is a good choice for active children -- whether it's for big brother after a soccer game or for little sister after playing in the yard all day -- because it supplies energy and electrolytes that encourage them to drink by "turning on" their thirst. Recently published research by Oded Bar-Or, M.D., a Professor of Pediatrics at McMaster University, indicates that during exercise, children stayed better hydrated when they drank a sports drink compared to drinking plain or flavoured water.

The reason: children voluntarily drank more of the sports drink, which contained carbohydrate and sodium. Ruth Carey, R.D., sports nutritionist and youth soccer coach, adds, "I've spent a lot of time on the sidelines of soccer games and parents, knowing my sports nutrition background, often ask my opinion on what kids should drink before, during and after activity. I tell them water is fine, but that I prefer to give my kids a flavoured sports drink like Gatorade because they drink more and stay better hydrated."

Somewhat surprising, sports drinks only contain half the sugar and calories of many other beverage choices, including fruit juices and regular soft drinks. Sports drinks also have less sodium than a glass of milk or a slice of bread.

## **The Juicy Story**

Fruit juices are typically fine for children after the playing is over. They contain important vitamins. However, juice isn't always the best choice when rehydrating an active child before or during activity. The high sugar content in juice can slow fluid absorption and increase the chance of a stomachache. No kid wants to be side-lined because of a stomachache in the middle of his soccer game.

## **Carbonation: Forget the Fizz**

Carbonated soft drinks, which are also high in sugar, are not appropriate during or after prolonged activity. The "fizz" in a carbonated beverage may cause a "burning" sensation in the mouth and may prevent your child from chugging enough fluids. Research shows that even a small amount of carbonation can also upset the stomach and cause a bloated feeling during exercise.

## **To keep kids cooled & fueled, follow these helpful tips:**

- To help protect your children from the heat and dehydration, encourage them to drink fluids before, during and after sports and activities.
- Whether it's extremely hot or not, have your children drink on a schedule (approximately every 15 to 20 minutes during physical activity), because dehydration begins before they're thirsty.
- Make drinking fun by giving your child a squeeze bottle filled with a chilled beverage. To keep beverages chilled for game day or other outside activity: freeze half of the fluid in the squeeze bottle the day before the game, then add the rest of the fluid on game day.