



For The Early Learning Centre Sector

Nutrition Fact Sheet

Healthy Drink Choices

Spring 2026



Healthy drinks are just as important as healthy foods in supporting children's growth and development. It is essential to ensure that children stay hydrated while also receiving important nutrients from their drinks. In this factsheet, we explore a range of drink options and provide tips to help children make healthy drink choices.

Key Messages

- Healthy drink choices support children’s growth and wellbeing by helping them meet their nutrient needs and stay hydrated.
- Sugary drinks are not recommended, as they can contribute to tooth decay and unhealthy weight gain.
- Fruit juice is a concentrated source of natural sugars and does not provide the same amount of fibre as whole fruit.
- Establish healthy drinking habits by making healthy drinks a regular and appealing choice.

In addition to their nutritional benefits, healthy drinks play a key role in keeping children hydrated. As young children are more vulnerable to dehydration than adults, they need regular access to fluids throughout the day. Adequate hydration helps regulate body temperature and supports concentration, learning, overall health, and wellbeing.

Healthy Drink Choices for Infants and Young Children

Age Group	Healthy Drink Choices
6-12 months	• Breast milk • Infant formula • Small amounts of cooled boiled water
1-2 years	• Water • Full-fat milk
2+ years old	• Water • Reduced-fat milk

Why Is Cow's Milk Not Suitable for Infants Under 12 Months?

Cow’s milk (or any other type of milk such as goat’s, soy, almond, oat, rice and coconut milk) should not replace breast milk or infant formula for infants, as it does not provide the nutrients they need and may increase the risk of low iron levels. However, small amount of cow’s milk can be used in cooking from 6 months.

Do Healthy Drinks Matter?

Healthy drinks are just as important as healthy food. Making healthy drink choices supports children's growth and development by helping them meet their nutrient needs without consuming drinks that are high in energy but low in nutritional value.



Drinks That Are Not Recommended

Some drinks (such as soft drinks, flavoured waters, flavoured milk, cordials and energy drinks) can contribute to tooth decay and unhealthy weight gain. Teas contain natural chemicals that can affect nutrient absorption and other chemicals not suitable for young children. In addition, caffeinated drinks should be avoided, as there is no safe level of caffeine consumption for children.



Is Fruit Juice A Healthy Drink?

Fruit juice can be tricky. While it contains fruit, it is often high in natural sugars and may also contain added sugar or sweeteners. Regular consumption can contribute to tooth decay and excess energy intake. Unlike whole fruit, fruit juice contains little or no fibre, making it a less nutritious option. Therefore, fruit juice is not needed for infants and not recommended for young children.



Healthy Drinking Tips

- Take a water bottle when going out.
- Offer water with all meals and snacks.
- For toddlers (1+ years), offering food before milk helps to protect small appetite and establish healthy eating habit.
- Use a blender rather than a juicer when making fruit juice to help keep the fibre.

Make Healthy Drinks Appealing

- Blend yogurt, milk and fruits to make **smoothies** (suitable from 1+ years, choose reduced fat dairy for 2+ years).
- Let toddlers and young children **choose** their favourite fruits to add to smoothies.
- Use colourful cups or fun straws.



Take Home Message

- Avoid sweet and caffeinated drinks to support healthy teeth and growth.
- Encourage water as the main drink and make it easy to access for children aged 1+ years.
- Choose whole fruit over fruit juice for essential fibre intake.
- Make healthy drinks fun and appealing for children.

For more information, please visit:
The NSW Ministry of Health: Caring for Children
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Publications/caring-for-children-manual.pdf>
Raising Children Network - Healthy Drinks for Kids and Teenagers
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/nutrition-fitness/healthy-eating-habits/healthy-drinks>

