

Water? Coffee? Tea?

You think about the food on your plate and its nutritional value, but how often do you consider your beverage choice? You probably have a glass of some beverage at mealtimes, and may enjoy drinks as snacks in between meals as well. What do you drink during those times? If you find that sugary, highly caffeinated drinks are predominant, it is time to change your beverage habits.

The primary purpose of drinking beverages is to keep the body well hydrated. Water is one of the most critical components of your body— in fact, your body is up to 78% water. Keeping that level stable is critical to good health, and dehydration leads to unhealthy balances of other nutrients in the body. Certain beverages help hydration, while others actually can dehydrate your body. How can you make good choices when deciding what to drink?

Never before have we had so many beverage choices. Between your refrigerator and kitchen cabinets, you can probably find close to a dozen different things to drink right now. Of course, some choices are better than others, and balance is very important. The beverages you drink can either support your healthy eating efforts or sabotage them.



LEARN MORE

Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.

USDA Nutrition Information

www.choosemyplate.gov

CDC Rethink Your Drink

www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/drinks.html

HEALTHY BEVERAGES



The primary purpose of drinking is to keep hydrated. Water is one of the most critical components of the human body.

HEALTHY DIRECTIONS

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HEALTHY DIRECTIONS



Energy Drinks

Even though they are opposed by most nutritionists, the temporary, sizable energy boost they give to the mind and body is the reason energy drinks are so popular. That boost might be enhanced by natural ingredients like ginseng and other herbs, but the primary ingredient is caffeine. In fact, the caffeine in energy drinks can be up to three times the amount in a soda or cup of coffee. Caffeine is an addictive drug that stimulates the senses, creating a temporary sense of alertness and energy. Energy drinks loaded with caffeine and sugars can cause dehydration and hurt your progress towards good nutrition.

Alcohol

We all know the dangers of consuming too much alcohol, but there is a lot of debate about the nutritional value of alcohol. Most fruity cocktails have high amounts of sugar to give them their attractive flavor, and that is one reason alcohol can be a hindrance to good nutrition. The damage to organs and other body systems should be enough to influence you to choose another beverage option when considering your health.



Fruit and vegetable juices are a great way to meet your daily need for food groups. Be careful though – some are high in sugars and sodium.

Soft Drinks

You can't deny the high sugar and sodium content in most soft drinks. Full-calorie sodas should be strictly limited— avoid having refills at restaurants, and don't keep a stock available in the refrigerator.



Diet sodas are better in some ways, but they do have dangers of their own. Studies have shown that artificial sweeteners in diet sodas actually increase appetite, especially for sweet foods. Diet drinks are a good substitute for full-calorie sodas, but you should still limit them.

Sports Drinks

From watching the commercials, you might get the impression that sports drinks are even healthier than water. Sports drinks give athletes an extra boost in the electrolytes they need when exerting themselves, but it is not a good idea to drink large amounts of them on a regular basis. They are very high in sodium, which can actually cause dehydration. Sports drinks serve a purpose, but only in limited quantities and in specific situations.



Coffee and Tea

Developing the habit of drinking coffee and tea daily can create caffeine dependence, and coffee carries additional health concerns— acid stains teeth and breaks down enamel, for example. Decaffeinated versions of both drinks are healthier choices.

Fruit and Vegetable Juices

Drinking fruit juice is a great way to get your daily recommended fruit allowance. The delicious, sweet flavor makes a great choice. But be careful when choosing them: many beverages advertised as fruit juice are mostly fruit-flavored sugar water. Look for labels like "100% fruit juice," and always read the ingredient list. If sugar or corn syrup is added, it's not a healthy drink.

Vegetable juice is also a convenient way to increase your vegetable intake. The main caution is to keep an eye out for high sodium. Be sure to check the sodium level, even if the label says "low sodium."

Flavored/Vitamin Waters

Many vitamin water brands contain high amounts of valuable nutrients like potassium and vitamins B and C. These drinks can be good health supplements, especially if you are lacking in those vitamins. Check the label though, because many of them contain high amounts of sugar, possibly sabotaging your healthy eating efforts.



Milk

Your body needs calcium for healthy bone growth and maintenance. Low fat milk is a better option than whole milk, since it provides the same calcium content with less fat.

Water

There's no way around it: Water is the healthiest thing you can drink. All other beverages are mostly water with other nutrients added to them. Health experts recommend drinking between 2 and 3 liters of fluid per day. Most of that should be water, but you can include the other beverages you drink in your daily calculation.

Beverage Habits

Replace unhealthy drinks with milk, decaffeinated tea or, best of all, plain water. Keeping bottled water in the car, at your desk, and in your bedroom is a great way to encourage yourself to drink enough water during the day. If you have some water within reach, you will be less tempted to head to the vending machine or the refrigerator for a soda.

It may take some time for your body to get accustomed to not having a shot of caffeine or sugar every day, but the effort will benefit your overall health. Making small changes over time will lead to nutritious habits and a healthier lifestyle.