MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL

MassGeneral Hospital for Children™

DOWN SYNDROME PROGRAM
www.massgeneral.org/downsyndrome

Sip Something Simple: An Easy Guide to Drinking Less Sugar

Sugary drinks can cause weight gain or obesity, which can lead to serious health problems in people with and without Down syndrome. In this handout, you will learn the effects of sugary drinks on your health and how to find added sugars in ingredient labels. You will also learn tips to create healthier habits when it comes to what you drink.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH SUGARY DRINKS?

Sugary drinks are very tempting, but they are also the biggest source of sugar in people's diets. Typically, sugary drinks do not provide any **nutrition** (nutrients, like vitamins, minerals and fiber) to keep your body strong and feeling good.

When choosing a drink, it is important to make sure it is hydrating and has little or no added sugar. Sugary drinks only provide calories. When a product is labeled "no added sugar" or "100% natural," this still means it could be high in sugar and low in fiber, just like the other drink options with added sugar. **Fiber** (a nutrient found in many whole grains and whole fruits and vegetables) is important for good digestion and a healthy heart.

Did you know…?

One 8-ounce (oz.) glass (or 1 cup) of 100% orange juice has as much sugar as 5 oranges, with about half as much water! That's a whole lot of sugar! Instead, try making your own orange juice using 4 oz. (1/2 cup) of fresh orange and 4 oz. (1/2 cup) of orange-flavored water.

Think before you drink

Sugary drinks can not only lead to weight gain, but they can also raise your blood sugar and increase your appetite. This can lead to overeating. Instead, a better choice would be still or sparkling water. For flavor, add your favorite fruits or herbs, like mint.

HOW DO SUGARY DRINKS AFFECT MY HEALTH?

Sugary drinks can cause health problems for people with Down syndrome. These health problems include unhealthy weight gain and **obesity** (excess body fat).

Unhealthy weight gain and obesity can lead to the following health problems:

- Liver damage
- Heart disease
- Depression
- Back pain
- Type 2 diabetes
- Tooth decay (such as cavities)
- Different cancers
- Different **chronic** (long-term) diseases
- Increased risk of early death

HOW MUCH ADDED SUGAR IS OKAY?

According to the American Heart Association, sugar recommendations are based on age. The following is the recommended amount of added sugar one should have per day:

- Heart disease
- Children 2- to 18-year-olds: less than 25 grams
- Adult females: no more than 24 grams
- Adult males: having 36 grams

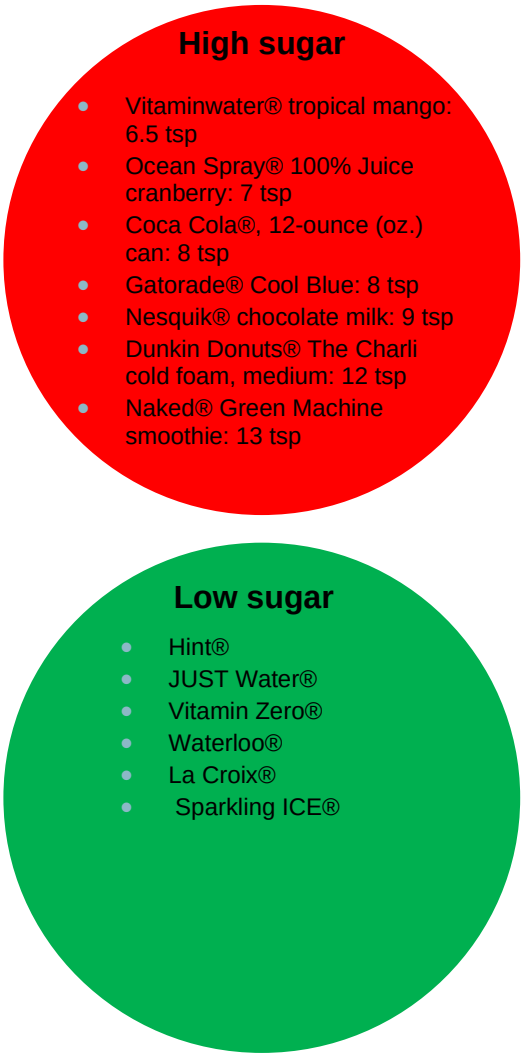
The average American eats about 3 times more added sugar than the maximum recommended amount to have every day.

More information on the next page >>>

HOW MUCH SUGAR IS IN MY DRINK?

One regular can of soda has 35 grams of added sugar. That is 8 teaspoons of added sugar, which is the same as amount of sugar as eating **6 donuts**.

This picture includes 7 examples of drinks with very high amounts of sugar (in teaspoons, or tsp) in the red. On the green side, there are 6 healthier options with little or no sugar:



Are artificial sweeteners okay to drink or eat?

Doctors and registered dietitians are still learning about the effects of artificial sweeteners on blood sugar levels. Artificial sweeteners could affect your blood sugar levels, so it is best to avoid drinks with artificial sweeteners or drinks labeled as **diet**. When a food or drink is labeled as diet, it is very likely that artificial sweeteners have been added.

HOW DO I FIND ADDED SUGARS ON INGREDIENT LABELS?

Ingredients labels have lots of different ways of listing added sugars. This can be confusing or misleading.

Here are a few ingredients that labels may use to list **added sugar:**

- Cane, beet, raw and coconut sugar
- Caramel
- Dextrose, fructose, maltose and sucrose
- Honey or agave
- Invert sugar
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Molasses
- Syrups, including corn, glucose, malt and maple
- Treacle

It is important to remember that even though a drink (like the Naked® smoothies, for example) can have no added sugars, the TOTAL amount of sugar is still far over the recommended amount. These drinks have no fiber. They can also cause the same "sugar high" as a soda.

TIPS TO CREATE HEALTHIER DRINK HABITS

- Keep sugary drinks out of the home. This will save you money and help you care for your health!
- Do not introduce sugary drinks to babies and children. If babies and children do not see or taste sugary drinks, they are less likely to drink them in the future.
- Show, model and encourage healthy drinking habits. Drink lots of water, seltzer or low-fat milk.
- Pack water bottles for school, day care and trips. Try adding fresh fruit to water to make it exciting!
- When eating out or getting takeout, choose water.
- Add a splash of 100% juice to water or sparkling water. This can curb a juice or sugar craving.

Did you know…?

It is best to drink milk and milk alternatives (such as dairy-free milks, like nut, pea, rice or soy milks) in moderation, according to dietary guidelines from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). For more information on USDA recommendations on drinking milk, visit: www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/dairy.

Rev. 12/2021. MassGeneral Hospital for Children and Massachusetts General Hospital do not endorse any of the brands listed on this handout. This handout is intended to provide health information so that you can be better informed. It is not a substitute for medical advice and should not be used to treatment of any medical conditions.