

The "Skinny" on What your baby or Toddler should Drink

Most babies are ready to start drinking **whole (cow's) milk** after their first birthday. Before this, they should be drinking breast milk or if breast feeding is not possible, iron-fortified infant formula. Whole milk does not contain enough iron and linoleic acid for children under one year, and it contains too much sodium, potassium, and protein. Children between the ages of one and two should drink whole milk to make sure that they are receiving the fat and calories they need for brain development and proper growth.



Water is an essential part of the diet of children over one year of age, as it helps to regulate body temperature, to carry nutrients and oxygen to cells, to lubricate joints, and to protect organs and tissues. Children don't handle extreme temperatures very well, they sweat less, and they get hotter when they exercise, so parents need to be especially careful that they are getting enough. Babies six months and younger should not receive water instead of or in addition to breast milk or formula. If your baby gets sick and needs extra fluids, most providers will recommend an oral rehydration solution like Pedialyte instead of plain water. On occasion, your provider may recommend an ounce or two of water to help with constipation. There is a potentially dangerous condition called "water intoxication" that occurs from ingesting too much water. This occurs most commonly in infants and serious athletes by causing an electrolyte imbalance that may lead to serious health problems.

In addition to water and milk, another healthful beverage your child can drink is 100% fruit juice. Kids tend to love its naturally sweet taste, and there is a wide variety of fruit juices to choose from. 100% fruit juice offers many of the same nutrients, and in some cases more, as its fruit counterpart (with the exception of fiber), and counts as a serving from the fruit group in the Food Guide Pyramid. Unless the label says otherwise, all the sugar in 100% fruit juice comes from the fruit itself. Recent studies have shown no correlation between childhood obesity and the consumption of 100% fruit juice- in fact, just the opposite. Fruit juice contains higher amounts of Potassium, Vitamin C and Magnesium than its fruit counterpart. Make sure to always read labels carefully -- many store bought juices contain only 5% or 10% fruit juice and have other sweeteners added.



The best time for your baby to start drinking fruit juice varies. Both the American Academy of Family Practice and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend starting with 4-6 oz of "diluted" fruit juice per day, ideally equal parts of juice and water mixed together. They also recommend not starting juice until after one year of age, especially for breastfed infants. In some cases, it is ok to introduce juice at six months, however you should check with your provider first to make sure that there are no weight or nutritional concerns. It is never a good idea to put juice in a bottle, as this is known to cause tooth decay. No infant younger than six months of age should have anything to drink besides breast milk or formula unless otherwise directed by your healthcare provider.

For younger tummies, you may want to start with 2-4 ounces of diluted juice and gradually add more as your child gets older. For children at least two years old, 6 ounces of 100% juice counts as a serving from the Fruit Group on the food pyramid of which 2-4 servings are recommended each day. For children 7 to 18 years old, 8-12 ounces of 100% juice is acceptable.

