



Drinking water the way for children to beat obesity so . . . Forget those super-sweet drinks

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A SPOONFUL of sugar may hit the spot for Mary Poppins and the super nanny's remedy may have helped wash down nasty-tasting medicine, but Australian children are guzzling far too much sugar in their drinks.

A glass of soft drink and fruit juices can contain as much as six teaspoons of sugar.

Water, not sugary drinks, should be the drink of choice for children, according to one State Government health initiative.

The "Good for Kids, Good for Life" water campaign is part of NSW Health's strategy to reduce overweightness and obesity in children.

The campaign's key message to parents and carers of children up to 15 is simple.

When it comes to thirst, drink water first. Tap water is the best, and cheapest, way to quench thirst

without the sugar and kilojoules found in fruit drinks, juices, soft drinks, sports drinks and flavoured mineral waters. These drinks are not necessary and should only be drunk occasionally, not daily.

These super-sweet drinks contain as much as six teaspoons of sugar in every 250ml glass. According to data from NSW Health, lemonade, cola drinks and even apple juice have six teaspoons of sugar, sweetened orange juice has five and unsweetened orange four.

With its vitamin C content, fruit juice is often regarded as a healthy alternative, but it has between four to six teaspoons of sugar per 250ml glass. One small, 125ml glass of most juices provides a child's daily vitamin C requirement.

NSW Health recommends that children eat a piece of fruit for the

fibre content.

Drinking tap water rather than sweetened drinks also helps prevent dental problems. Fluoride found in tap water aids the development of strong teeth.

Forestville mother Alison Kopp carefully regulates what her children drink. The drink of choice, and the only drink on offer at home for 11-year-old Elye and Sienna, 10, is water.

"My children drink water. I don't keep cordials and soft drinks at home. I've always drunk water, so that's what they drink, too. And, of course, drinking water is much better for their teeth," Alison said.

"Cola is for parties and they are allowed to share a juice or one of the sports drinks in the holidays as a treat."

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Drinks such as fruit juice have a healthy image but contain lots of sugar.

Picture: ANNIKA ENDERBORG



Any sugary drink is 'unacceptable'

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The high content of sugar in fruit juice comes as a shock to the health-conscious mum.

"It's a surprise that there is so much sugar in both apple and orange juice. I can't believe that there are six teaspoons of sugar in apple juice. Like a lot of mums, I've always thought that a fruit juice is a healthier alternative.

"It's made me think more about letting them have juice. They both like eating fruit, Sienna loves strawberries, kiwi fruit and rockmelon and that's something I'm going to encourage."

Dietitian Susie Burrell takes a completely hard-line approach. Any type of sugary drink is totally unacceptable to Ms Burrell, a specialist weight management dietitian at The Children's Hospital, Westmead.

"Kids should be drinking water, not sugar-laden drinks. Parents should ensure that they don't have any soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit juices. Six teaspoons is far too much concentrated energy for children. And, just because it's fruit juice, doesn't mean that it's healthy. Fruit juices contain fructose.

"Children regularly drink these types of drinks are more likely to be overweight and have dental problems. There should be a blanket 'no', even for the occasional treat. If kids are allowed

NSW Health has several tips for parents on ways to encourage children to drink water and cut down on sugar.

- Pack a bottle filled with tap water whenever you go out
- Put a frozen water bottle in your child's lunch box in summer
- Have cold tap water available at all times at home instead of sweetened drinks
- Try adding a slice of orange, lemon or lime to a jug of cold tap water
- When participating in sports, encourage your child to drink water rather than sports or energy drinks
- Gradually water down juices, sports and energy drinks and cordials until your child is happy to replace these with tap water
- Use smaller glasses when serving sugary drinks for children and limit the number and serve size

to have sugary drinks occasionally, they start to want them all the time."

Ms Burrell recommends milk, which is a good source of calcium and important for the growth of strong teeth and bones, as an alternative to water.

"Milk is OK, but children over two should be drinking low-fat milk. It has the same nutrients as full-fat milk. Children under two shouldn't have low-fat milk, they need full-fat milk."