

Parent Communications— Balanced Diet Theme

Adapted from President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2006, Food & Fun After School Unit 3 Parent Communications.

Newsletter article: Use this *Planet Health* article in your class or school newsletter. Think about publishing a *Planet Health* message each month to help parents and students tune in to healthy lifestyle choices and tune out of screen time.

Be Sugar Smart

The largest source of added sugar in children's diets is not cake or candy—it's drinks sweetened with sugar! Children, especially teenagers, are drinking more soda, punch, and sport drinks than ever before. The added sugar in those drinks provides few nutrients for growing bodies; in fact, a diet high in that type of sugar increases a child's chance of becoming overweight, getting too little calcium (from not drinking milk), and getting dental cavities.

The problem is that most of the time, children (and parents!) don't realize how much sugar is added to their favorite drinks. Teaching kids to be sugar smart can help them make better choices for years to come. With so many sugary products available, setting a good example at home is more important than ever.

What can you do to make sure your family is sugar smart?

- Serve water and low-fat milk as the primary drinks during snack and meal times. A glass of 100% juice is good too, as long as the quantity is limited.
- Read drink labels in order to avoid purchasing drinks high in added sugar. Sometimes added sugar is listed as sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, or fruit juice concentrates.
- Set limits on soda and other sugar-filled drinks. If your children enjoy soda, try buying the half cans so they can satisfy their cravings without overindulging. Allowing soda only once a week or on special occasions is another way to set limits.
- Experiment with diluting fruit juices with seltzer water for a refreshing, fruity alternative to soda. There are endless possibilities with flavored seltzers.
- Save sport drinks for intense sport competition (lasting more than 1 hour) or for when kids are playing hard for a long time in the heat.
- Try naturally sweet snacks your kids could enjoy in place of high-sugar options: fruit (fresh, frozen, or dried), granola, animal crackers, graham crackers, low-sugar cereals (5 to 10 grams per serving).