

Frequently Asked Questions about Sugary Drinks

What are sugary drinks?

Sugary drinks are liquids that contain free sugars. For example: soda/soft drinks, fruit drinks (punch, cocktail), juices (including 100% fruit juice), sport drinks, sweetened milk or milk alternatives, sweetened coffees and teas, vitamin waters and energy drinks.

What are free sugars?

Free sugars are those sugars that are removed from their original source and added to foods as a sweetener or as a preservative. There are many different forms of 'free sugars' including, for example, cane juice, corn syrup, maple syrup, honey, brown rice sugar, barley malt, agave nectar, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrate, etc. Free sugars do not include the sugars present in whole fruit and vegetables, which are sometimes known as intrinsic sugars. These sugars are encapsulated by a plant cell wall. They tend to be digested more slowly and take longer to enter the blood stream than free sugars.

Is 100% fruit juice a healthy choice?

Juice that has been removed from fruit is considered a 'free sugar'. Fruit juice has a similar effect on teeth and overall health as sugar in other sugary drinks. It is recommended that children limit juice to no more than 125-175 mL (4- 6 ounces) per day. Eating a whole piece of fruit is a healthier choice, as it provides water and extra nutrients and is more filling than juice.

Are sports drinks appropriate for children?

Public Health Services promotes water, not sports drinks, as the principal source of hydration for children and adolescents. Water is generally all that is necessary for the average child engaged in routine physical activity. The benefits of sports drinks are appropriate only for athletes or individuals engaging in prolonged (*i.e.*, longer than 90 minutes), high-intensity physical activity and/or those activities performed in high temperatures and humidity.

Are artificial sweeteners a preferred substitute to sugar?

Health Canada has approved the safety of several sugar substitutes, which are subject to rigorous controls under the Food and Drugs Act and Regulations. Health Canada advises anyone experiencing stomach discomfort or diarrhea from consuming sugar substitutes to cut back on intake. Drinks containing artificial sweeteners should not be offered to young children.

There is inconsistent evidence about whether artificial sweeteners have adverse, beneficial, or neutral effects on weight. There are some concerns that artificial sweeteners may reduce the body's ability to regulate calorie intake and may promote a preference for sweet taste. More research is needed to determine the utility of artificial sweeteners for weight control.