

[IMAGE]

Soft Drinks and School Kids Don't Mix

Despite the soft drink industry's insistence to the contrary, mounting evidence suggests that soft drink consumption, particularly by children, is a leading cause of childhood obesity. Up to 85 percent of all children enrolled in school consume at least one soft drink a day, and 20 percent consume a whopping four or more soft drinks daily.

To combat the increase of childhood obesity and subsequently improve the health of schoolchildren, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently released a policy statement outlining ways to reduce or eliminate the consumption of soft drinks in schools. Among the AAP's recommendations:

1. Pediatricians should work to eliminate sweetened drinks in schools, and promote healthy alternatives, such as real fruit and vegetable juices, water, and low-fat white or flavored milk.
2. Pediatricians should push for the creation of a nutrition advisory council at each school, composed of parents, school and community officials, food service groups and health care providers. This will help ensure that student health remains the foundation of a school's nutritional policy.
3. School districts should hold public hearings before deciding to sign any contract with a food or drink vendor. If a school district already has a soft drink contract in place, it should be modified so that it doesn't promote overconsumption by students.
4. The consumption of sweetened soft drinks in the classroom should be eliminated, as should any advertising that promotes soft drinks.

How can parents help? By making sure their children have limited access to soft drinks and sweetened beverages - at school and at home. Take those bottles of soda out of the refrigerator and replace them with 100% fruit juices, which have the vital nutrients growing kids need - and far less of the corn syrup, sugar and other empty calories found in sodas. They may complain a bit, but in the long run, they'll probably thank you for it.

Reference:

American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health. Policy Statement: Soft Drinks in Schools.
Pediatrics January 2004;113(1), pp152-154.

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