

# Make Water Available Throughout the Day

## Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program



### When children are thirsty between meals and snacks, water is the best beverage choice.

The amount of water needed will vary among young children, and increase on hot summer days, during physical activity, and on dry winter days. You can help by making safe drinking water **freely accessible\*** to children throughout the day. Drinking water can:



- **Keep children hydrated and healthy.**
- **Help build and maintain strong teeth, if water includes fluoride.**
- **Help rinse food from teeth, and reduce acid in the mouth, both of which contribute to dental cavities.**
- **Help children develop a habit of drinking water that they will keep for life.**

## How and When Should Water be Made Available?

- ▶ **CACFP standards require providers to make water freely accessible\* throughout the day.** Water must be available to drink upon children's request, but does not have to be available for them to self-serve. While drinking water must be made available to children during meal times, it is not part of the reimbursable meal and may *not* be served instead of fluid milk.
- ▶ **Children who drink too much liquid right before a meal may feel too full to eat.** Providers should keep this in mind when deciding how much water to offer a child right before meals.
- ▶ **Replace other high-calorie, sweetened beverages** that are served outside of meal times with plain, unflavored, noncarbonated water.
- ▶ **Serve fluoridated tap water.** Many community tap water supplies contain fluoride. Most bottled water is not fluoridated. Bottled water is not necessarily safer than regular tap water, and it's more expensive.



\* **"Freely accessible"** can mean allowing children to access water from a water fountain whenever they are thirsty.

*Or, providers can make clean, small pitchers of water and single-use paper cups available in the classrooms and on the playgrounds, or make paper cups available next to the kitchen sink.*

*Allow children to serve themselves water when they are thirsty, or provide water to a child when he or she requests it.*

*Water is an excellent beverage choice at snack time, along with your two other reimbursable meal components.*

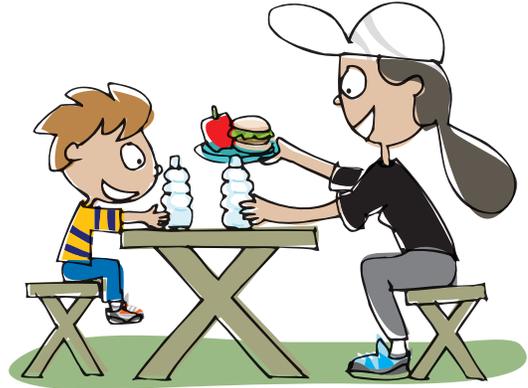


## How can I offer more water and fewer sweetened drinks?

Most children 2 years and older drink beverages with too much added sugar. These extra calories from added sugars make it harder for children to keep a healthy weight.

Water is calorie-free, so drinking water during the day can reduce the total number of calories consumed. Water also satisfies thirst and keeps children well-hydrated. Try these simple tips:

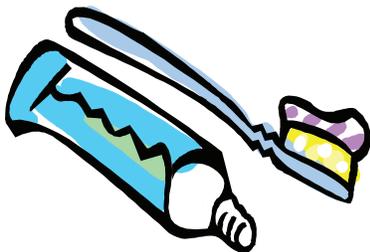
- ▶ **Serve plain, unflavored, noncarbonated water** instead of fruit-flavored drinks, soda, fruit nectars, sports drinks, or other sweetened drinks.
- ▶ **Be sure to have water available** when children are playing outdoors or doing other physical activity.
- ▶ **Let water be the only choice** when children are thirsty outside of meal and snack times.



## How can I help encourage kids to drink water instead of sweetened drinks?

When children taste sugar and sweet flavors often, they learn to prefer these sweet flavors more and more. Offering beverages without added sugars can help children learn to like foods and beverages that are not as sweet. Here are some ways to get kids excited about drinking water:

- ▶ **Prepare pitchers of water together.** Children learn about drinking water when they help. Young children can help bring paper cups to the table, and children 4 years and older can pour water into pitchers. [http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles\\_Newsletter\\_31.pdf](http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_31.pdf)
- ▶ **Drink water and kids will too.** They learn from watching you. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers/daily-food-plans/about-beverages.html>



- ▶ **Encourage good dental hygiene.** Explain that when sugar is in contact with teeth, it can contribute to cavities. To reduce sugar in the mouth and lower cavity risk, have children drink fluoridated water and floss and brush teeth with fluoride toothpaste. If children do not brush their teeth after eating, they should be offered water to drink to help rinse food from their mouth.
- ▶ **Send the message home.** Share the *Nibbles for Health* take-home newsletter for parents on keeping their child's healthy smile. [http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles\\_Newsletter\\_24.pdf](http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_24.pdf)

## How can I keep drinking water safe?

- ▶ **Keep drinking fountains clean, sanitized, and maintained** to provide adequate drainage. Teach children to drink water from a cup and to drink from a fountain without putting their mouths to the spout.
- ▶ **Provide single-use paper cups by the kitchen sink or a water pitcher** for children to use when they feel thirsty.
- ▶ **Purchasing water for children may be considered a reasonable and allowable cost for CACFP programs** only if safe drinking water is not available in the facility.
- ▶ **Ice cubes pose a choking hazard to children under 4 years old.** (See Appendix A on page 77 for more information.)



## Activities

### How can I put this information into practice?

Locate safe water sources inside and outside the child care facility or home. They are located:

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### How will you make water available throughout the day, both indoors and outdoors?

Make sure that water is freely accessible to children, with clean cups to drink from when appropriate. Put a check mark next to the ideas you will try next month.

- Small pitchers of water
- Kitchen sink faucet
- Water fountain
- Water jugs on the playground
- Other ideas:

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# My Notes:

