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Sports Drinks Best for Active Kids

But Not All Sports Drinks Contain Sufficient Ingredients

By [Jeanie Lerche Davis](#)
WebMD Medical News

Reviewed By [Brunilda Nazario, MD](#)
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May 2, 2003 -- Active kids need good hydration to prevent heat stroke -- it's just that simple. In fact, kids who play sports are likely to sweat a lot and need electrolytes found in the tried-and-true sports drinks. Some fruit drinks or soft drinks won't prevent dehydration or heat-related illnesses.

That's the word from the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), which has set out a few guidelines to help parents and coaches know the best fluids that active kids should drink.

"As a sports nutritionist and mother of active kids, I know there's a lot of misinformation out there and I get all kinds of questions from parents about what drinks are best for kids when playing sports," says Jackie Berning, PhD, RD, a sports nutrition consultant for NAYS, in a news release.

"Parents need to know that all beverages are not created equal when it comes to hydrating kids on the playing field. The best beverages taste good when your child is active and encourage drinking," she says.

The Hydration Report Card outlines the ideal formulation for beverages for active kids. Based on these criteria, beverages for active kids fall into three categories:

Makes the grade -- Sports drinks qualify because research shows their light flavor and sodium encourage kids to drink up to 90% more than plain water to stay better hydrated.

OK (if it's the only drink available) -- Water falls in this category because it's a good thirst quencher, but research shows kids find it challenging to drink enough. And water doesn't replace the electrolytes kids lose through sweat.

Falls short -- Fruit juices, fruit drinks, and soft drinks don't have the right amount of electrolytes and contain too much sugar -- which can upset the stomach and slow a child down.

Also, products that just add "sport" to their name -- or show a sports scene on their label - - are not real sports drinks. Don't be fooled just because the words 'energy' or 'electrolytes' appear on the package. It doesn't mean the beverage is truly supplying the right amounts or types of these ingredients.

The recommended beverage contents, according to the NAYS, for active kids during sports and activities should contain at least 100 mg of sodium and at least 28 mg of potassium per 8 ounces and should be noncarbonated.

Some beverages are fine for meal time, Berning points out. However, what's good with meals often falls short when kids are active.

SOURCES: News release, National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS). NAYS Active Kids' Hydration Report Card.



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