

Pointers For Parents

It's Time To Think About Their Lunch Drinks

(NAPSA)—When kids head to the classroom, it's time to think about school lunches. Whether your children pack or buy school lunch, do not overlook the beverage portion of their meals.

Chocolate and other flavored milks are an increasingly popular option for kids, but some parents, school administrators and teachers may object to this choice because of the added sugars. They seem to be particularly concerned about the varieties that contain high-fructose corn syrup.

Yet, nutritionists say flavored milk can be a secret weapon to help kids drink more milk and get the calcium and protein their growing bodies need.

"Kids love the taste of flavored milk, and parents should feel good about offering a nutrient-packed beverage," said registered dietitian Kris Clark, Ph.D., RD, an assistant professor of nutrition at Penn State University. "Most flavored milks contain only about 60 calories more per serving compared to unflavored milk, and the high-fructose corn syrup should not be a concern. And the additional calories are OK when you consider all the extra nutrients milk provides."

In fact, Clark said there is a lot of misinformation about high-fructose corn syrup that has needlessly alarmed parents.

Myth: High-fructose corn syrup is a type of "supercharged" sugar.

Fact: This corn sweetener is nutritionally the same as table



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sugar or sucrose, which comes from sugarcane or beets. High-fructose corn syrup is not sweeter than sugar, it's not higher in calories and it's not metabolized differently. "What many people do not realize is that high-fructose corn syrup is composed of the same simple sugars—glucose and fructose—in the same amounts found in table sugar and honey," said Clark. "There is no difference in how the body handles these sweeteners; they're indistinguishable once they hit the bloodstream."

Myth: There is something unique about high-fructose corn syrup that is to blame for obesity.

Fact: Our country's weight problem is due to excessive calorie intake and inactivity, not a single ingredient in our food supply, according to Clark. "There's no one reason why we've seen the escalating rates of childhood obesity—it all comes down to calorie

balance," she said. "Kids are eating too many calories and not burning off those calories by being active." Clark said the calorie density of high-fructose corn syrup is relatively low—only four calories per gram, compared to nine calories per gram for fats. It's also important to consider that if a child is encouraged to be more physically active, the energy in the flavored milk is used in the same way other carbohydrates are used—to fuel the activity.

Myth: High-fructose corn syrup is a thick and goeey synthetic ingredient.

Fact: This corn sweetener is actually thin and clear. High-fructose corn syrup is made from cornstarch and contains no artificial ingredients or synthetic substances.

Clark said that research continues to confirm that high-fructose corn syrup is safe and no different from other common sweeteners such as sugar and honey.

"It's a reality that kids are going to have some sugar in their diets, whether that's table sugar, honey, pancake syrup or high-fructose corn syrup," said Clark. "Just be sure the majority of the added sugars they consume are from a nutrient-rich food or beverage, and practice moderation with concentrated sweets like candy and desserts."

To increase your sugar I.Q. and to learn more about high-fructose corn syrup and other sweeteners, check out sweetsurprise.com.