



HEALTHY HOME HEALTHY FAMILY

Children's Perceptions of the Importance of Limiting Sugar Sweetened Beverages and Strategies for Controlling Intake

K. Eck, MS, RD;¹ A. Dinesen, MS;¹ C. Delaney;¹ K. Shelnett, PhD, RD;² M. Olfert, PhD, RD;³ C. Byrd-Bredbenner, PhD, RD, FAND¹
¹Nutritional Sciences Department, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ; ²Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; ³Department of Animal and Nutritional Sciences, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV



Abstract

Objectives: To describe children's thoughts related to sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and their strategies for controlling intake.

Methods: School-aged children (ages 6 to 11 years) in 3 states (FL, NJ, WV) completed surveys (n=197) and participated in SSB themed focus groups conducted by trained moderators (n=44). Two trained researchers continuously monitored data to identify the point of data saturation and coded data to detect themes and trends.

Results: Surveyed kids reported drinking SSBs 2.47±2.44SD times/week. Focus group discussions revealed that the SSBs kids most commonly drank were soda, sports drinks, lemonade, and fruit drinks. Kids indicated they were more likely to drink soda only on weekends or at special events, while sports and juice drinks were drunk more regularly, particularly at school. Kids thought it was important to limit SSBs to prevent tooth cavities, diabetes, and feeling "sick". Kids also cited the importance of drinking water for hydration, but few mentioned calories or weight gain. Kids preferred the taste of SSBs over other beverages which made it hard for them to limit their intake. Kids relied on their parents to help them control intake by limiting the number of SSBs kids were allowed, not purchasing SSBs, and buying healthy alternatives like diet soda and water. Kids felt parents could get kids to drink fewer SSBs by talking to their kids about the negative health consequences of drinking too many SSBs and rewarding children for having healthy drinks. Kids also felt they could play a role in helping their families drink fewer SSBs by telling family members that SSBs are unhealthy and encouraging them to drink milk or water instead. Kids agreed that they mimicked their parents' beverage choices and wanted to drink whatever their parents had. Kids recognized that their own beverage choices influenced what family members, particularly siblings, drank. Some kids reported encouraging their siblings to select healthier beverages.

Conclusions: Elementary school-age kids are aware of several negative health consequences associated with SSB intake, but not the potential negative effects on weight. Children relied on parents to help them limit SSBs. Future nutrition interventions should help parents understand how they affect kids' SSB intake through modeling behaviors and setting limits.

Methods

Sample:

- School-aged children: ages 6 to 11 years
- Lived in 3 states: FL, NJ, WV

Data Collection and Analysis:

- Brief self-report survey (n=194)
- Focus group discussions (n=44)
- Continuous data monitoring to identify data saturation
- Content analysis to identify themes and trends



"When I drink soda, sometimes my family wants it, too."

"You can't have them [sugary beverages] every day because you might get sick."

"If you drink water or milk, then you get something [reward from your parents]"



"Yes, you should have a limit. Maybe 3 or 4 times a week."

"You still feel thirsty after drinking a sugary drink, but not if you drink water."



"Don't drink sugary drinks around siblings; if siblings are around they are likely to see what you are drinking and would like that drink."

Strengths & Limitations

Strengths:

- Heterogeneous sample recruited in 3 unique geographical locations
- Discussions were led by trained moderators using scripted moderator guides

Limitations:

- Focus groups led by different researchers in each state

Funding Source

United States Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Grant Number 2017-680001-26351

Results

Behaviors:

- Kids reported drinking SSBs 2.47±2.44SD times/week.
- Most commonly consumed SSBs were:
 - Soda
 - Sports drinks
 - Lemonade
 - Fruit drinks
- Soda was more likely to be drunk on weekends or at special events
- Sports and juice drinks were drunk more regularly than soda

Knowledge:

- Kids thought it was important to limit SSBs to prevent:
 - Tooth cavities
 - Diabetes
 - Feeling "sick"
- Kids felt it was important to drink water for hydration
- Few mentioned SSB calories or contributions to weight gain

Barriers and Facilitators:

- Kids preferred the taste of SSBs over other beverages
- Kids relied on parents to help them control SSB intake by:
 - Limiting the number of SSBs kids were allowed
 - Not purchasing SSBs
 - Buying healthy alternatives (diet soda and water)
- Kids felt parents could get kids to drink less SSBs by:
 - Talking to their kids about the negative health consequences of SSB
 - Rewarding children for having healthy drinks
- Kids felt they could help their families drink less SSBs by:
 - Telling family members that SSBs are unhealthy
 - Encouraging them to drink milk or water instead

Conclusions

- Kids are aware of some negative health consequences associated with SSB intake, but not the potential negative effects on weight
- Children relied on parents to help them limit SSBs
- Future nutrition interventions should help parents understand how they affect children's SSB intake through modeling behaviors and setting limits



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

West Virginia University