

HELPING KIDS

to drink more water and milk or milk alternatives, and to cut down on sugar-sweetened and energy drinks

In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of boys and girls aged 2 to 17 years who are overweight. This phenomenon is in part explained by their excessive consumption of sugar-sweetened and energy drinks. This is not surprising, since these beverages are loaded with sugar and provide far more calories than children need.

Daily consumption of a sugar-sweetened beverage significantly increases the risk of obesity and several related health problems, namely:

- cardiovascular and respiratory disease;
- type 2 diabetes;
- certain psychosocial disorders related to self-image and self-esteem, social skills, stress, anxiety and sometimes even depression.

These problems are emerging at an increasingly young age.

This is why we all need to take action: decision-makers, those in charge of food offerings, and stakeholders in different sectors. Our goal is to make “the healthy choice the easiest choice” across Quebec.

WHY TAKE ACTION?

Because young people:

- **Do not drink enough water, which is harmful to their health.** Drinking one to two litres of water a day can help prevent weight gain by avoiding unnecessary calories between meals.
- **Do not drink enough milk and therefore have inadequate intakes of certain nutrients considered essential for their health, especially for their bones and teeth.** A high proportion of teenagers do not get enough vitamin A, magnesium and zinc, and have low intakes of potassium and calcium. Milk also quenches thirst, since it consists of approximately 85% water.

MANY FACTORS DRIVE THE CONSUMPTION OF SUGAR-SWEETENED AND ENERGY DRINKS

These high-calorie, nutrient-poor beverages are **readily available** and heavily promoted through **aggressive marketing campaigns**.

Price is another key factor. The affordability of some sugar-sweetened drinks makes them an attractive option to young people who, despite their growing purchasing power, are still low-budget consumers.

HOW TO CHANGE THE SITUATION?

Changes must be made to the environments in which young people spend most of their time, in order to help them make healthy choices. Our goal is to support comprehensive, complementary actions addressing the individual and environmental factors that shape young people's behaviours.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

DAYCARES AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

- Review the centre's food policy or develop a new policy to offer a variety of nutritious beverages (water fountain, milk and alternatives, 100% pure, unsweetened fruit juices).
- Give educators the tools they need to get the right message across, to organize fun educational activities, and to become healthy eating role models. Educators should receive training on:
 - the basic principles of healthy eating and the importance of regularly drinking water;
 - what it takes to be a role model (attitude, supervision and dietary discipline);
 - examples of relevant programs and tools;
 - ways to recognize and reinforce parents' skills by involving them in leading and supporting food education activities.
- Help those in charge of food offerings provide a healthy selection. This includes:
 - reviewing the Quebec health department's Going the Healthy Route at School framework policy;
 - providing tips and advice on how to improve food offerings (variety, balance, taste, shelf life);
 - making sure children have access to water (water jugs on all tables at mealtimes, water fountains, etc.).

SCHOOLS AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Update the Going the Healthy Route at School framework policy to promote a healthy, varied diet and the organization of special activities, fundraising campaigns, school trips and educational outings.
- Provide school staff with the tools they need to get the right message across, organize fun educational activities, and become healthy eating role models.
- Help those in charge of food offerings provide a healthy selection.
- Regularly offer practical educational activities on food and cooking that cover the basic principles of healthy eating.

MUNICIPALITIES, COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

- Adopt measures and a food policy in municipal facilities (arenas, sports centres, recreation centres, etc.), within organizations and at public events (block parties, etc.) in order to:
 - provide varied, nutritious beverages and ban sugar-sweetened and energy drinks;
 - control sponsorship of events and activities to limit advertising of sugar-sweetened and energy drinks;
 - offer water, milk, milk alternatives and 100% pure, unsweetened fruit juices at a lower cost than other beverages.
- Install attractive water fountains in strategic and visible locations, and inform residents.
- Develop promotional and awareness-raising activities on alternatives to sugar-sweetened and energy drinks (challenges, workshops, demonstrations, reusable bottles, etc.).
- Support lobbying efforts to limit the availability of sugar-sweetened and energy drinks, increase taxes on these products, and ban their sale to minors.

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Prévention
Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon