

THE LURES AND LIES ABOUT SPORTS DRINKS



Watching kids guzzle drinks promoted to enhance their physical abilities may look like a good choice, but is it? A 32 oz sports drink contains between 56 g and 76 g of sugar—about 14 to 19 teaspoons. That’s four to five times more sugar than your child should be consuming ... for the entire day!

That’s not just my opinion. I’m basing that on the World Health Organization (WHO) sugar consumption guidelines: 5% of a person’s total energy intake. That average calculates to four teaspoons (16 g) per day for 4-8 year-olds and jumps to five teaspoons for 9-13 year-olds.

Not coincidentally, the American Heart Association (AHA) echoed the recommendations. Scarily, to heed these guidelines, the US needs to reduce sugar consumption by a killer 75%! If these sugar guidelines sound strict, I assure you they’re not. Remember that half our US kids are obese or overweight, predictive of adult obesity, Type 2 Diabetes and Heart Disease. If we were as worried about this health threat as we were about COVID, we’d have banned sugary beverages altogether!

Do you ever wonder how sports drinks got the reputation as performance-enhancing health drinks? The same Gatorade that sits in the sideline coolers today is now fifty-eight years old. But is it the same? Not even close.

I’ll never forget my first taste of Gatorade as a little kid. I had to spit it out! It tasted nasty—like a salty chemical spill. The original drink was developed by Drs. Robert Cade and Dana Shires in response to the exhaustion and dehydration that the Florida Gators footballers suffered—reportedly, some would lose up to fifteen pounds during a hot, sunny afternoon. Dr. Cade, a kidney specialist, sought a way to boost their electrolyte-rich plasma during play.

The electrolytes Cade added were sodium citrate and monopotassium. But the original amount of lemon-lime flavoring and glucose were not enough to overpower the awful taste of this stuff, and I wasn’t the only one to spit it out. Players complained it tasted like a cross between urine and the toilet bowl cleaner itself. They had to add an artificial sweetener, much sweeter than sugar, just to get them to drink it.

When Gatorade was sold to Quaker Oats in 1983, Fruit Punch Gatorade made its debut. Now it’s owned by PepsiCo, and, no joke, it’s their fourth largest brand. They dumped in a bunch more sugar and/or artificial sweeteners (i.e., Gatorade Zero); both choices stimulate insulin resistance. Reformulating Gatorade as a health threat was clearly not what Cade set out to do at all, especially given that most kids are not endurance athletes.

As you know, Gatorade comes in all kinds of iridescent colors and a variety of sizes. It competes with Coca-Cola’s Powerade and Vitaminwater brands, as well as several others that vie for a higher position in the still-soaring sports drink market.

Vitaminwater has the unearned perception of a healthier choice. Coca-Cola’s marketing campaign assigned descriptors like focus, endurance, refresh, and essential. It’s true, it contains vitamins, just as all our candied-up breakfast cereals do. But it has virtually the same whopping dose of sugar (32g per 20 oz) as Gatorade and Powerade (35 g). Even for your teen athletes, a single bottle of Vitaminwater is more than 100% of the sugar intake they can healthily consume—again, for the entire day!

I implore you to join efforts with the WHO, that has a particular focus on upending unhealthy weight gain and dental caries. And, with the AHA in its determination to reduce the threat of heart disease and metabolic inflexibility. Today you may seem like a mean parent (aka Brave Parent), but your children will, in the blink of an eye, be adults—and they will thank you for the rest of their tomorrows!



Dr. Susan Maples is a dentist in Holt. She is also a speaker, health educator, and author of “BlabberMouth! 77 Secrets Only Your Mouth Can Tell You to Live a Healthier, Happier, Sexier Life” and “Brave Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy Kids (Against All Odds) in Today’s World.” Reach her at Susan@DrSusanMaples.com



Total Health Dentistry
Susan Maples, DDS | Tracey Epley, DMD

Total-Health-Dentistry.com
517-694-0353