

## AHA: Limit children's sugar consumption to 6 teaspoons per day

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Children should not consume more than 6 teaspoons of added sugar per day, according to new recommendations from the American Heart Association (AHA).

The limit applies to those ages 2-18 years, a group that takes in more than three times that amount on average.

“We believe the scientific evidence for our recommendations is strong, and having a specific amount to target will significantly help parents and public health advocates provide the best nutrition possible for our children,” lead author Miriam B. Vos, M.D., M.S.P.H., nutrition scientist and associate professor of pediatrics at Emory University School of Medicine, said in a news release.

A panel of experts, including several AAP Fellows, reviewed literature on added sugar and links to health issues like blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

“Associations between added sugars and increased cardiovascular disease risk factors among U.S. children are present at levels far below current consumption levels,” the authors wrote in the scientific statement [Added Sugars and Cardiovascular Disease Risk in Children](#), published Monday in the AHA journal *Circulation*



(<http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/early/2016/08/22/CIR.000000000000439>).

On average, U.S. children consume 19 teaspoons of added sugar daily, largely from soda, fruit-flavored drinks, sports drinks, cakes and cookies, according to the report. The AHA made three recommendations:

- Children over age 2 years should consume no more than 6 teaspoons (25 grams) of added sugar each day.
- Children should not drink more than one 8-ounce sugar-sweetened beverage per week.
- Children under 2 years should avoid consuming any added sugar since they need nutrient-rich diets and are developing taste preferences.

Each of the three recommendations has a different level of evidence backing it, and the authors identified gaps in the research such as whether there is a threshold between healthy and unhealthy sugar

consumption. The group did not make a recommendation on no-calorie artificial sweeteners due to a lack of research.

Dr. Vos called 6 teaspoons of added sugar each day “a healthy and achievable target.”

“If your child is eating the right amount of calories to achieve or maintain a healthy body weight, there isn’t much room in their food ‘budget’ for low-value junk foods, which is where most added sugars are found,” she said.

The group says its recommendations align with the [2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) released by federal health officials, which recommend limiting added sugars to 10% of daily calories. The Academy recommends considering children’s diet as a whole and says sweets should be eaten in moderation, but it does not lay out specific limits.

“I think we still have to consider sugars in a broad context of dietary factors, but clearly the current consumption is too high and I think the (AHA) recommendation to limit that is good,” said Stephen R. Daniels, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Committee on Nutrition.

Pediatricians may find the report helpful in talking to families about nutrition and identifying some of the biggest sources of added sugar.

“It shouldn’t just be directed at families where obesity is an issue,” Dr. Daniels said. “It really ought to be viewed as a broader approach to diet — kind of similar to the way I think we should be viewing sodium in the diet.”

The AHA recommends parents watch food labels for added sugar in the form of fructose, high-fructose corn syrup, glucose, honey, lactose and sucrose. In July 2018, they will be able to see added sugar amounts listed on the labels.

“Until then, the best way to avoid added sugars in your child’s diet is to serve mostly foods that are high in nutrition, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, lean meat, poultry and fish, and to limit foods with little nutritional value,” Dr. Vos said.

## **Resources**

- [AAP policy "Snacks, Sweetened Beverages, Added Sugars and Schools"](#)
- [AAP clinical report "The Role of the Pediatrician in Primary Prevention of Obesity"](#)
- [Information for parents on childhood nutrition](#)

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