

Parents urged to curtail sports drinks for kids

Jeran Wittenstein, Bloomberg News

Tuesday, May 31, 2011

Sports drinks aren't necessary for children and teenagers and are likely to contribute to obesity, according to U.S. researchers urging parents to limit consumption of the beverages.

While adolescent athletes engaged in vigorous physical activity may benefit from the carbohydrates and electrolytes provided by drinks such as Gatorade and Powerade, researchers said water should be the beverage of choice for hydration.

"For most children engaging in routine physical activity, plain water is best," said Holly Benjamin, a co-author of the study published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*. "Sports drinks contain extra calories that children don't need."

Obesity in children and adolescents ages 2 to 19 rose in the United States to almost 17 percent in 2007-08 from 5 percent in 1971-74, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Monday's study also focused on the effects of energy drinks that contain caffeine and other stimulants. These beverages can damage adolescents' neurologic and cardiovascular systems and shouldn't be consumed, said Benjamin, a University of Chicago associate professor of pediatrics.

"Some kids are drinking energy drinks - containing large amounts of caffeine - when their goal is simply to rehydrate after exercise," said study co-author Marcie Beth Schneider, a pediatrician in Greenwich, Conn. "This means they are ingesting large amounts of caffeine and other stimulants, which can be dangerous."

Energy drinks "are not intended for young consumers," said Maureen Storey, senior vice president of science policy for the American Beverage Association.

"Sports drinks have a long history of scientific research showing their benefits for hydration," Storey said. "As with all food and beverages, they should be consumed in moderation."

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/05/31/MNDD1JNAT4.DTL>

This article appeared on page **A - 6** of the San Francisco Chronicle

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