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Apple juice can pose health risk — from calories

It's true; apple juice can pose a health risk, but not necessarily from the trace amounts of arsenic that people are arguing about. Despite the government's consideration of new limits on arsenic, nutrition experts say apple juice's real danger is to waistlines and children's teeth.

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By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE**
The Associated Press

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Despite the government's consideration of new limits on arsenic, nutrition experts say apple juice's real danger is to waistlines and children's teeth. Apple juice has few natural nutrients, lots of calories and, in some cases, more sugar than soda. It trains a child to like very sweet things, displaces better beverages and foods, and adds to the obesity problem, its critics say.

"It's like sugar water," said Judith Stern, a nutrition professor at the University of California, Davis, who has consulted for candy makers and Weight Watchers. "I won't let my 3-year-old grandson drink apple juice."

Many juices are fortified with vitamins, so they're not just empty calories. But that doesn't appease some nutritionists.

"If it wasn't healthy in the first place, adding vitamins doesn't make it into a health food," and if it causes weight gain, it's not a healthy choice, said Karen Ansel, a registered dietitian in New York and spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says juice can be part of a healthful diet, but its policy is blunt: "Fruit juice offers no nutritional benefit for infants younger than 6 months" and no benefits over whole fruit for older children.

Only 17 percent of the apple juice sold in the U.S. is produced here. The rest comes from other countries, mostly China, Argentina, Chile and Brazil, according to the Food Institute's Almanac of Juice Products and the Juice Products Association, a trade group.

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A few months ago, television's Dr. Mehmet Oz raised an alarm — some say a false alarm — over arsenic in apple juice, based on tests his show commissioned by a private lab. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said its own tests disagreed and that apple juice is safe.

However, on Wednesday, after Consumer Reports tested several juice brands and called along with other consumer groups for stricter standards, the FDA said it will examine whether its restrictions on the amount of arsenic allowed in apple juice are stringent enough.

Arsenic is naturally present in water, air, food and soil in two forms: organic and inorganic. According to the FDA, organic arsenic passes through the body quickly and is essentially harmless. Inorganic arsenic — the type found in pesticides — can be toxic and may pose a cancer risk if consumed at high levels or over a long period.

All juice sold in the United States must be safe and meet U.S. standards, said Pat Faison, technical director for the juice association. As for making good nutrition choices, "A lot of the information that people need about fruit juices is on the label," she said.

So what's on those labels?

Carbohydrates, mostly sugars, in a much higher concentration than in milk. Juice has a small amount of protein and minerals and lacks the fiber in whole fruit, the pediatrics academy notes.

"Whole fruits are much better for you," said Dr. Frank Greer, a University of Wisconsin, Madison, professor and former head of the pediatrics academy's nutrition committee.

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