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Sugar is No. 1 apple juice health risk

By Marilynn Marchione
Associated Press ▪ Friday December 2, 2011 5:46 AM

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It's true: Apple juice can pose a risk to your health. But not necessarily from the trace amounts of arsenic that people are arguing about.

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. "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

Juice tips

Advice from nutrition experts about juice consumption:

• Choose a juice fortified with calcium and vitamin D-3.

• Give children only pasteurized juice; it's the only type that is safe from germs that can cause serious disease.

• Don't give juice before

6 months of age, and never put it in bottles or covered cups that allow babies and children to consume it throughout the day, which can cause tooth decay. For the same reason, don't give infants juice at bedtime.

• Limit juice to 4 to 6 ounces per day for children ages 1 to 6, and 8 to 12 ounces for those ages 7 to 18.

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• Encourage children to

eat fruit.

• Don't be swayed by healthy sounding label claims. "No sugar added" doesn't mean it isn't full of naturally occurring sugar. And "cholesterol-free" is

silly — only animal products contain cholesterol.

Source: Associated Press

be part of a healthy 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 kids.

Kids younger than 12 consume 28 percent of all juice and juice drinks, according to the academy. Nationwide, apple juice is second only to orange juice in popularity. The average American slurps 267 ounces of apple juice a year, according to the Food Institute's Almanac of Juice Products and the Juice

Products Association, a

trade group. Lots more is consumed as an ingredient in juice drinks and various foods.

Only 17 percent of the apple juice sold in the United States is produced here. The rest comes from other countries, mostly China, Argentina, Chile and Brazil, the association said.

Television's Dr. Mehmet Oz made that a key point a few months ago when he 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 said that its tests disagreed and that apple juice is safe.

However, on Wednesday, after *Consumer Reports* conducted tests on several juice brands, the FDA said it will examine whether its restrictions on the amount of arsenic allowed in apple juice are stringent enough.

Some forms of arsenic, such as the type found in pesticides, can be toxic and might pose a cancer risk if consumed at high levels.

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