

4 Delicious Ways to Balance Your Beverages

Whether you are young or old, it's time to rethink what you are drinking. Overall, we drink way too many high-calorie, nutrient-poor beverages, such as soft drinks, sweetened teas and fruit drinks, sports drinks, and so called "energy" drinks. Over-consumption of these sugary beverages may contribute to our weight problems, since liquid calories don't seem to register very well in our brains. At the same time, we are not drinking enough nutrient-rich, low-fat milk - packed with protein, calcium, and other body building nutrients (such as vitamin A and D, magnesium, potassium, and phosphorus). Here are four smart tips to support strong bodies and smart brains at ALL ages.

Drink plenty of refreshing, calorie-free WATER.

Water does the body good. Without any unnecessary calories, it helps your muscles and brain stay hydrated - for optimal physical and mental performance. It also keeps your stomach, intestines, and kidneys functioning smoothly - so you can digest your food efficiently and get rid of waste effectively. How much water you need depends on your size and activity level; larger, more active folks need more. Drink enough for your urine to be mostly colorless and odor-free.

Drink nutrient-rich, lower fat MILK three times a day.

Milk isn't just for kids; it's just as essential for moms and dads. Nutrient-rich dairy foods help build and maintain healthy bones and teeth for a lifetime; they may also help build muscle mass, maintain a healthy weight, and lower high blood pressure risk. For the most nutrients with the least fat and calories, go for fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%). An 8-oz. glass at each meal is an easy way to 3-a-day. Like chocolate milk? Stick with low-fat - and enjoy all the same nutrients as in plain.

Drink 4 to 6 ounces of 100% fruit or veggie JUICE a day.

While 100% juice can be a great source of several nutrients, it is possible to get too much of a good thing. Fruits and veggies are much better ways to get vitamins, minerals, and fluids. Whole produce tends to be more satisfying, plus you get the added value of fiber and phytonutrients from the skin and pulp. Want an easy way to extend the flavor of juice? Mix pure fruit juice with sparkling water or herbal tea; add a zesty lemon or lime wedge - and maybe a sprig of mint.

Drink other beverages with care.

Notice that we've left a long list of other, expensive high-calorie beverages for last? That's because most other drinks are loaded with things we don't need, while offering very little of what our bodies actually crave. Soft drinks, sweetened teas and fruit drinks (as well as many sports and "energy" drinks) are loaded with calories and sometimes caffeine. Fancy coffee drinks are often surprisingly high in calories, fat, and sugar. Here are some ways to manage the "other" category:

- **Be a label reader and nutrition investigator:** Check calories, caffeine, sugar, and fat **before** you drink. If the numbers you want aren't on the label, call the manufacturer's toll-free number or visit their web site.
- **Steer clear of the super-charged "energy" drinks:** Watch for label warnings, since some brands have excessive levels of caffeine for youth and pregnant women. Do not consume any beverage that has alcohol mixed with caffeine.
- **Stick with small sizes or share larger ones:** Moderation is always a smart way to treat your body well.