



Fruit juice in early childhood linked to less risk of adult obesity

New study tracks diets from early childhood finding that fruit juice doesn't link to risk of adult obesity.



Summary

Experts from the University of Swansea, UK, have revealed the results from a long-term tracking study of childhood diets and health. A key finding is that giving pre-school children 100% fruit juice does not increase the risk of excess body fat or weight gain in adulthood. Furthermore, girls who drank fruit juice in early childhood had a lower adult body fat and weight. In contrast, giving sugar-sweetened soft drinks to pre-school boys or girls was associated with higher body fat and weight in adulthood. The results are published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*¹.

Birth to adulthood

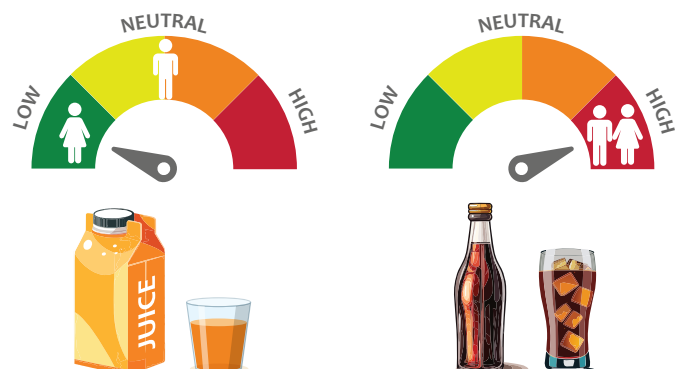
The new study is an analysis of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children which recruited 14,000 British children at birth and followed them up regularly until their twenties². Regular assessments of diet, growth and health were made. The current analysis divided adult participants into those who had consumed 100% fruit juice or sugar-sweetened beverages at the age of 24 months and tracked associations with body weight and body fat at 24 years of age.

Fruit juice isn't associated with later weight gain

In males, drinking fruit juices, such as apple juice, in early life was not associated with body weight or fat by the age of 24 years. In females, childhood fruit juice consumption was associated with lower body weight and fat in adulthood.

A different relationship was seen when sugar-sweetened drinks, such as cola, were examined. Both males and females who drank these in early childhood had a higher body weight and fat when they reached their mid-twenties. This suggests that early exposure to sugar-sweetened drinks may increase the risk of adult obesity.

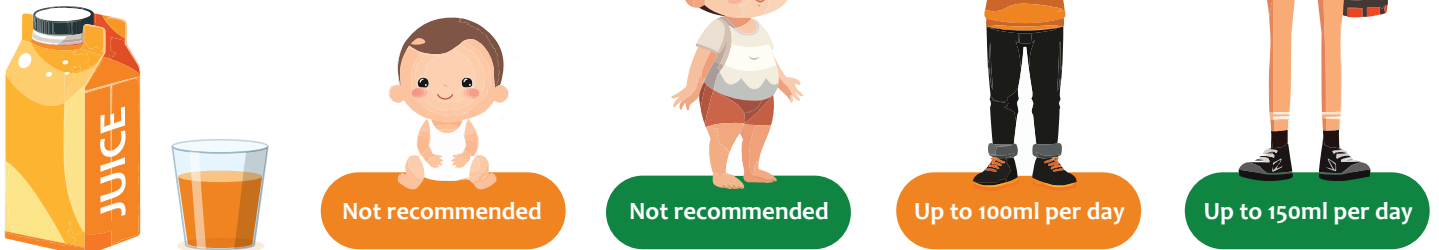
How do childhood drinks affect risk of overweight in adulthood



Fruit juice recommendations for children

Benefits of Fruit Juice³

- Source of essential nutrients: vitamin C, folate, and potassium.
- No added sugar.



Infographic based on Reference 3

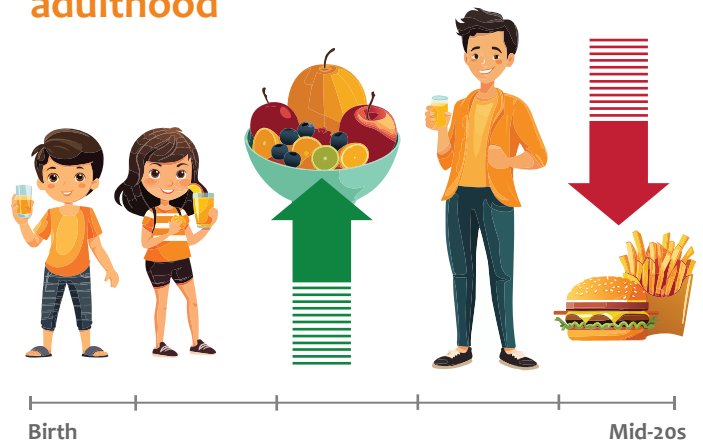
Fruit juice is a nutritious drink

The authors speculate that a reason for the results could be that fruit juices contain vitamins and minerals alongside naturally occurring sugars from the fruit, whereas fizzy drinks contain added sugars. Another could be that fruit juice is a marker for healthier family diet choices. As revealed in the new study, young children who drank cola were eating more calories, fat, protein and free sugars, and less fibre, by the age of three years. However, children given apple juice had lower fat and free sugar intakes, and higher protein and fibre intakes.

The differences in nutrients also tracked into food choices. Healthier dietary patterns were seen when young children drank fruit juice compared with sweetened drinks. Apple juice consumption was linked with fewer burgers, sausages, chocolates, sweets, puddings, and biscuits, and more fish, fruit, green vegetables, and salad. Cola, on the other hand, was linked with more burgers, sausages, pizza, French fries, meat, chocolate, and sweets, but less fruit.

In conclusion, parents should avoid giving sugar-sweetened drinks to children to avoid impacting on later body weight and fat. Fruit juices, such as orange and apple juices, are a safer and more nutritious option and can be included in the diet from the age of five years³.

Drinking fruit juice in childhood is linked to a healthier diet in adulthood



Reference

1. Benton D & Young HA (2024) European Journal of Nutrition; in press.
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41430-024-01430-y>
2. ALSPAC study website
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/>
3. Healthy Beverage Consensus Statement
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