

Has soda pop become kids' drink of choice?

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- When you ask a group of lunching children how many of them drink soda with their dinners, a good majority will raise their hands.

Some children say they don't like white milk. Some children say they don't drink milk at all, and when they get their first cup, they drink five refills. You have to wonder what goes on at home. Has soda pop become the drink of choice? Let's compare what can't be compared: According to nutritionists, nothing can replace the nutritional content of milk.

According to soda drinkers, nothing replaces the satisfaction of carbonation.

According to the National Institutes of Health, teens don't get enough dietary calcium.

According to teens, they don't have enough money to buy all the soda they want.

According to a book on health food and natural healing, milk is soothing to ulcers.

According to claims against soda, a nail can be dissolved in soda in less than a week.

Carbonate it! Make it cheap! Bottle it so it won't go bad! I can just see it now - the No. 1 taste-treat delight - Bofizz - the drink that kicks! Cow pop for the young sophisticate.

Not funny? Neither are parents who choose zero nutrition and health-damaging soda over milk. I've heard it all: My children can't or won't drink milk; milk encourages tooth decay; milk promotes obesity in children; milk upsets children's stomachs.

Milk can encourage tooth decay when it stays in the mouth (at bedtime, for instance). But cheese stops decay by protecting the tooth enamel from assault by substances such as soda. It is thought that cheese has an antibacterial agent that protects teeth.

Too much fat? Fat from milk is not an empty food. Milk products offer young children a good source of calories they need.

Milk offers vitamins B-1 and B-2, pantothenic acid, niacin, phosphorus and magnesium. These nutrients help release energy from other foods and produce enzymes that utilize the energy in food.

Soda fails to offer a single nutrient. What soda does is offer a quick high and a stunning low.

Milk also offers protein necessary for growth and maintenance and the repair of body tissue. Milk products contain all eight essential amino acids.

The wonderful variety of milk products offers children a smorgasbord of health, but parents have to do the buying.

What do you buy? Margarine has zero nutrition; it's cheap but empty. Butter has all the nutrients of milk plus a good source of vitamin D.

Cheese foods are made from oil and have little nutrition. Real cheese is high in protein, calcium, phosphorus and vitamin A.

Milk products are versatile. Sour cream can be added to anything - even peanut butter. Switch mayonnaise with sour cream when using ranch-dressing mix. Kids love it for dipping vegetables.

Here's a treat: Stiff- whip real cream with a teaspoon of chocolate-drink mix and your favorite nuts. Freeze for 10 minutes. It's loaded with vitamin A and is a good source of protein. Desserts will never be the same.

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