

UC Cooperative Extension: Children should drink more water over summer

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UC Cooperative Extension has launched the 2012 ReThink Your Drink Summer Campaign in Yolo County. During the summer, more children and adults will be encouraged to quench their thirst with a cold glass of water instead of a sugar-sweetened beverage like soda or sports drinks, according to a news release from Christie Hedrick, nutrition educator with the UC CalFresh Nutrition Education Program.

As part of a statewide campaign being launched this summer, UC CalFresh is collaborating with the Health Education Council to challenge everyone to ReThink Your Drink.

The UC CalFresh Program will be hosting a smoothie bike event every Wednesday in May at Esparto Elementary K-8 for individual classrooms. The students, ages 5 through 13, visit a smoothie station where they make smoothies with 100 percent fruit juice, yogurt and fresh fruit by pedaling a bicycle.

"This allows the students an opportunity to make and taste fresh fruit smoothies as a healthier beverage option while incorporating physical activity," Hedrick said.

The students also rotate through a structured physical activity and a ReThink Your Drink station where they learn about added sugars in popularly consumed beverages.

UC CalFresh Program recently showcased a ReThink Your Drink poster board displaying healthy beverage options versus less healthy options such as soda, sports and energy drinks at health fairs in Woodland. Participants who visited the display were encouraged to spin the ReThink Your Drink wheel and count out the number of sugar cubes the specific beverages contain.

"Not only are participants discovering how much sugar is in a specific beverage, they are learning how to read a beverage label to find out servings per container and types of added sugars," Hedrick said.

The UC CalFresh Program participated in Dia de los Ninos, Healthy Kids Day and Farm Connection Day showcasing the ReThink your Drink display. In addition, students signed pledge cards demonstrating their commitment to choose water, 100 percent fruit juice, or milk when reaching for a beverage this summer.

During the month of May and throughout the summer UC CalFresh will be participating in farmers markets and local festivals to showcase the ReThink Your Drink Statewide Summer Campaign launch.

Added sugar from soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages is a leading contributor to the serious childhood obesity epidemic in our county, with 33 percent of youth from infant to 17 years old being overweight.

According to the 2009 research brief "Bubbling Over: Soda Consumption and Its Link to Obesity in California," nearly 40 percent of children ages 2 to 11 and 63 percent of children ages 12 to 17 drink one or more sodas per day. Every additional soda a child drinks, their risk of obesity increases by 60 percent.

Sugar-sweetened beverages contribute 10 to 15 percent of calories a day to the American diet.

"That's why we are encouraging children and parents to reduce the amount of sugar-sweetened beverages they drink and replace them with healthy alternatives like water, nonfat milk or 100 percent fruit juice instead," Hedrick said.

Sugar-sweetened beverages are also the leading cause of dental cavities. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 20 percent of children ages 2 to 5 and 23 percent of children ages 6 to 19 have untreated cavities. As soon as children take a sip of soda, the acid starts to form and begins to break down the enamel that is designed to protect their teeth.