

Chocolate Milk: Is it bad For My Child's Teeth?

There has been some controversy recently as to the value of a child being offered chocolate milk as opposed to plain unflavored milk. A comprehensive investigation has brought to light some interesting and useful facts regarding chocolate milk consumption by children. Milk is a significant source of protein, calcium, riboflavin, magnesium, phosphorus, niacin, thiamine, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron and, often has Vitamin D added to it. In fact, 2 2/3 cups of milk provides children up to age ten with the USRDA recommended doses of calcium.

Chocolate milk is defined as whole, low-fat or skim milk which has had cocoa (chocolate) and a sweetener added to it. One of the more obvious facts that has been verified is that children prefer chocolate milk. Recent studies have shown that when children are offer a choice between unflavored or chocolate milk, the majority of them will drink chocolate milk and more of it.

Interesting enough further examination reveals that most brands of chocolate milk (chocolate milk that is prepared at the factory and sold in stores ready to drink) are made from low fat or skim milk. Consequently, children who are drinking brand name chocolate milk consume less fat from the milk than those who drink whole milk. In fact a cup of whole white milk contains 150 calories and 8 grams of fat and one cup of most brands of chocolate milk contains only 140 calories and contains only 2 grams of fat; please note, this applies only to the brand named, dairy prepared, chocolate milks. There are products available that are not really chocolate milk but imitations and these are typically loaded with sugars and lots of artificial ingredients. Be sure to read the labels and

select only true dairy products low in fat and sugars. It has also been found that when chocolate milk is mixed at home; more often than not they contain more sugar and more chocolate than the ready to drink kind. The powdered mixes often contain additives and artificial flavoring and even vitamins to make them more marketable. However, there is no evidence that these extra vitamins or other additives are useful, to say nothing of the extra sugar and carbohydrates.

To summarize, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry acknowledges that snacks are an important source of energy, nutrition and enjoyment for children and it is often difficult to find snacks that the children actually like and contribute to their health. There is also evidence that drinking a sweet drink with the meal may influence the child's eating habits and cause the child not to eat as well as a child who drinks plain white milk or water with a meal.

Considering these findings it is the consensus of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry that the nutritional benefit of chocolate milk is significant. The endorsement of chocolate milk is conditioned of course upon the assumption the child receives a comprehensive preventative dental program in place, which includes regular check-ups at the dentist, application of sealants, proper use of fluoride by regimes and the proper home care hygiene techniques.

. Chocolate milk meets many of the criteria, but it, like any sugar containing snack should not be made available to the child on a demand basis but should be offered occasionally in a limited amount. Too much of anything is never good and too much chocolate milk can negate any benefits derived from it.

William A. Keaty, DDS is a board certified practicing Pediatric Dentist in Lafayette, LA. Questions can be submitted by email at drkeaty@nocavitykids.com, by mail @ 350 Doucet Rd. Ste. 101, Lafayette, LA 70503. Answers will be addressed in this column as time and space permit.