



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National Nutrition Week 2017:

“Rethink your drink – choose water!”

September 2017

Questions and answers

Table of contents

1. What is National Nutrition Week (NNW)?.....	3
2. Why is it so important to drink plenty of clean, safe water every day?.....	3
3. At what age is it appropriate to start giving my baby water?.....	3
4. What is the recommended amount of water per person per day? For children and adults?	3
5. What are the tips for drinking more water every day?	4
6. How can I make drinking water more interesting?.....	4
7. What about commercially available flavoured water?.....	4
8. Can you get sick from drinking too much water?.....	5
9. Is tap water safe to drink?.....	5
10. What can one do to make drinking water safe?	5
11. What are sugary drinks?	5
12. What is the difference between free sugars and total sugar?.....	5
13. Is brown sugar or honey not a healthy alternative to white sugar?	6
14. What are the different names for sugar?.....	6
15. Why is there a focus on decreasing the drinking sugary drinks?	6
16. What effects does the consumption of frequent or large amounts of sugary drinks have on health?6	
17. I'm not overweight. Why do I need to worry about what I drink?.....	6
18. Why are people consuming so many sugary drinks?	7
19. Is there a recommended daily limit of free sugars?	7
20. How much sugar is in sugary drinks?.....	7
21. How can I find out more about how much sugar is in a drink?.....	7
22. What about 100 per cent fruit juice, even freshly extracted juice? Is that a healthy option?	8
23. Are sport drinks healthy options when one exercises?.....	8
24. What about diet drinks or artificially sweetened drinks?	8
25. What about other beverages such as coffee or tea?	8
26. Why should anyone decide what I can eat or drink?	9
27. Where can one get more information about NNW 2017?.....	9

1. What is National Nutrition Week (NNW)?

National Nutrition Week (NNW) started in the 1990s when the Department of Health was approached by the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA). It was agreed that it was important for nutrition messages to be included in the department health calendar. World Food Day is recognised on the 16th October, and Nutrition Week in the week preceding this, namely from 9 to 15 October.

The objective of NNW 2017 is to create awareness among the public about the adverse effect of sugary drinks on health and instead to make water their beverage of choice. **The theme for NNW 2017 is: “Rethink your drink – choose water”**. The theme is also in line with the South African Guidelines for Healthy Eating, namely (i) Use sugar and foods and drinks high in sugar sparingly and (ii) Drink lots of clean, safe water.

2. Why is it so important to drink plenty of clean, safe water every day?

Water constitutes the major portion of the human body (50-70 per cent or about two-thirds) and is essential for life. It regulates body temperature and is needed to enable the body to absorb nutrients from food and transport them around in the body. Water also removes waste products from the body.

It is important to drink clean, safe water to replace water losses that occur through the body to prevent dehydration. Other factors that increase the amount of water that is needed are breastfeeding, physical activity, vomiting, diarrhoea and fever due to illness. Fatigue, irritability and headaches are some of the symptoms of dehydration. When a person is dehydrated for a long time they may have pain in the joints, lower back, be constipated and their urine is a dark colour. Do not wait for your body to get thirsty – drink plenty of clean, safe water only to replace these losses. Sugary drinks including fruit juice, sweetened coffee or tea are not recommended in place of water.

3. At what age is it appropriate to start giving my baby water?

Babies should be given breastmilk only for the first six months of life. Breast milk contains all the energy, vitamins and other nutrients in the correct amounts and water that the baby needs. Even on a very hot day, breast milk satisfies a baby's thirst. It is important for the mother to drink sufficient water. Babies should not be given any other food or fluids not even water, except for medicine prescribed by a doctor or nurse. From the age of six months, complementary foods should be introduced and breastfeeding continued until the child is at least two years old. You can give your child clean safe water to drink during the day, but it is important to boil the water (to kill germs) and then cool it before you give it to your baby.

4. What is the recommended amount of water per person per day? For children and adults?

A common recommendation is to drink six or eight glasses of water or other fluid every day, but some adults may need more or less, depending on how healthy they are, how much they exercise, and how hot and dry the climate is. Water is ingested as plain drinking water and as beverages and in food, such as apples, oranges and melons. All of them contribute to total water

intake. There are some fairly easy rules of thumb to follow when it comes to hydration. One of the important ones is to pre-hydrate. In other words, drink water BEFORE you start feeling thirsty, or BEFORE you do an activity. It is also helpful to monitor your urine. If you are adequately hydrated, you should be urinating about once every two to four hours, and your urine should be colourless or a very pale yellow. If it is darker than that, you haven't had enough fluid. Headaches and dizziness are a late sign of dehydration. If you start experiencing those, you really need to up the water intake, and quickly.

5. What are the tips for drinking more water every day?

- Drink a glass of water rather than having a sugary drink.
- Always carry water with you.
- Keep a reusable water bottle with you and make sure to refill it regularly.
- Take a bottle of clean, safe water to school/workplace.
- Try setting reminders on your cell phone or computer every hour or notes at your desk to drink water regularly.
- Make it a habit to drink water with meals.
- Increase daily water intake when the weather is hot.
- Drink one to two glasses of water thirty minutes before exercising and sip extra water for the next few hours afterwards.
- Put the number of water bottles you would like to drink the next day in the refrigerator.
- Drink a glass of water before brushing your teeth.

6. How can I make drinking water more interesting?

Fresh slices of lemon, cucumber, mint leaves, lime slices or berries add a different flavour to your water. Most fresh or frozen fruits and herbs according to your favorite flavors and what you have on hand in your fridge, can be used to make naturally flavoured water. You can drink it right away, but the flavor intensifies if it's made an hour or two ahead. Kept refrigerated, the flavour is even better the next day. Flavoured water can keep up to three days in the fridge.

Make homemade unsweetened iced tea with rooibos or other fruity herbal teas. Add ice and garnish with lemon slices, mint leaves and fresh fruit slices.

Do not add sugar or honey to the coffee or tea.

7. What about commercially available flavoured water?

Commercially available flavoured drinks such as sweetened flavoured water, coconut water or vitamin enriched water contain sugar. For example, 500 ml of these drinks contain 15g – 31g sugar per 500 ml (two average-sized cups/glasses), which is about four to eight teaspoons of sugar.

8. Can you get sick from drinking too much water?

There are no health benefits to drinking more water than what is needed; when excess water is consumed it will be excreted as urine. However, the maximum amount of water that a person with a normal kidney function can drink is 800-1000 ml/hr to avoid hyponatremia (low sodium levels) symptoms¹. If you suffer from kidney failure, you may have water/ fluid restrictions.

9. Is tap water safe to drink?

South African tap water is generally safe to drink and the South African national standard compares well with the World Health Organization's (WHO) limits. Tap water also costs a lot less than bottled water and is healthy for the environment too. There may be areas around the country where the water may at times not meet the required technical standard; hence the need to ensure that the water one drinks is clean and safe.

10. What can one do to make drinking water safe?

If you are concerned about the safety of your water supply, then you should either boil the water for three minutes or add one teaspoon of bleach to 25 litres and leave it to stand for two hours. Some tap and natural water may have a slight brown tinge which is harmless and does not affect drinking water quality. It is important to store cooking and drinking water in separate containers.

11. What are sugary drinks?

Sugary drinks are drinks that are sweetened with various forms of free sugars. Examples include fizzy drinks, teas or coffees, flavoured waters, flavoured milk, drinking yogurt and sport and energy drinks. Fruit juices have a similar kilojoule and sugar content as drinks that have added sugar and are therefore regarded as sugary drinks. Sugary drinks therefore include sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) as well as fruit juices.

12. What is the difference between free sugars and total sugar?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)², free sugars are sugars that are added to foods and beverages by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, and sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates. Free sugars do not include intrinsic sugars, which are sugars that exist within the structure of intact fresh fruits and vegetables, and sugars naturally present in milk. Total sugars are the sum of the sugars that are added (free sugars) and the sugars that are naturally present in food and drinks.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4027093/>

² World Health Organization. (2015): Guidelines: Sugars intake for adults and children

13. Is brown sugar or honey not a healthy alternative to white sugar?

Honey and brown sugar fall in the category of sugars and do not have any health benefit over any other type of sugar or syrup and contain the same amount of kilojoules. Although brown sugar and honey may contain trace elements, the quantities present are very small.

14. What are the different names for sugar?

Sugar comes in many forms and with many names. Look at the ingredient list on the food label for names such as: sugar, brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fruit juice concentrates, sucrose, glucose, honey, invert sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, molasses, syrup or cane sugar.

15. Why is there a focus on decreasing the drinking sugary drinks?

Sugary drinks are major contributors to the rising problem of obesity rates. The consumption of sugary drinks has increased worldwide and South Africa is no exception. A 2014 study showed that the per capita consumption of soft drinks in the country increased by 69 per cent from 55 litres/capita per year from 1999 to 92.9 litres/capita per year in 2012³. The proportion of adults drinking sugary drinks in rural areas approximately doubled from 25 per cent to 56 per cent in women and from 33 to 63 per cent in men between 2005 and 2010. A recent study⁴ among adolescents in Soweto showed that sugary drink consumption among them was relatively high. On average, males consumed 44.7 g (11 teaspoons) and females 28.4 g (seven teaspoons) of added sugar per day from sugary drinks. Their total sugar intake per day from sugary drinks and confectionary was 80 g (20 teaspoons) for males and 69.1 g (17 teaspoons) for females.

16. What effects does the consumption of frequent or large amounts of sugary drinks have on health?

Frequent consumption is associated with weight gain and obesity; the development of other chronic diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes and heart disease; fragile bones and other bone diseases like osteoporosis as well as tooth decay and cavities.

17. I'm not overweight. Why do I need to worry about what I drink?

Weight alone is not the only indication of your overall health. Therefore, every person should eat healthy, irrespective of their weight. Sugary drinks can lead to increased visceral fat, a fat that builds up in and around organs in your body. This can lead to diabetes, heart disease, or a fatty

³ Ronquest-Ross L-C, Vink N, Sigge GO (2014): Food consumption changes in South Africa since 1994. S Afr J Sci. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2015/20140354>

⁴ Feeley AB, Norris SA (2014): Added sugar and dietary sodium intake from purchased fast food, confectionery, sweetened beverages and snacks among Sowetan adolescents. S Afr J CH 2014;8(3):88-91. DOI:10.7196/SAJCH.678. <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/sajch/v8n3/03.pdf>

liver. Extra kilojoules from sugary drinks make it harder for the average person to maintain a healthy weight, increasing the risk of becoming overweight over time.

18. Why are people consuming so many sugary drinks?

Sugary drinks are available everywhere and people have easy access to them at home, school, work, and retail food outlets. The prices of sugary drinks have also decreased whilst the portion sizes and marketing of sugary drinks have increased.

19. Is there a recommended daily limit of free sugars?

The WHO recommends that adults and children throughout life should reduce the intake of free sugars to less than 10 per cent of total energy intake and for more health benefits, to less than five per cent of total daily energy. This means that the maximum intake of free sugars from food and beverages per day for *adult men and adolescents* (14 – 18 years) should not be more than 12 teaspoons and for *adult women and children five to 13 years*, not more than nine teaspoons. To achieve more health benefits, the number of teaspoons of sugar from food and beverages per day for *adult men and adolescents* (14 – 18 years) should not be more than six teaspoons and for *adult women and children five to 13 years*, not more than five teaspoons.

20. How much sugar is in sugary drinks?

On average, commercially produced sugary drinks contain the following amounts of sugar per 500 ml serving (two average-sized cups/glasses):

- Sweetened fizzy drinks: 13 – 17 teaspoons
- Energy drinks: 13½ to 15 teaspoons
- Fruit juice: 12 – 16 teaspoons
- Sweetened flavoured milk or yoghurt-based drinks: 7 – 13½ teaspoons
- Sweetened iced tea: 8 – 10½ teaspoons
- Sports drinks: 4½ - 12 teaspoons
- Sweetened drinks, such as sweetened flavoured water, vitamin enriched water and coconut water: 4 – 8 teaspoons of water

21. How can I find out more about how much sugar is in a drink?

The food label on foods or drinks contain information on the ingredients that were used to manufacture the food or drink as well as a nutritional information table that gives the nutritional value of that food or drink. Look at the table with the nutritional information on the food label. Find the words: 'Total sugar' and see how much sugar in grams are indicated next to it. The container has to indicate the nutritional information per 100 ml and it may also include it per serving size. It is important to note the amount per serving size is set by the manufacturer, and may differ from what you typically drink. To calculate the number of teaspoons of sugar, divide the number of grams of total sugar by four. For example: If a 500 ml drink has 60 grams of sugar, divide 60 by four. That equals 15 teaspoons of sugar!

It is important to read the 'ingredient list' together with the 'nutrition information table' to determine if the total sugar in the product is mostly free sugars or if it is intrinsic sugars. For instance, an unflavoured, unsweetened milk could contain less than one teaspoon of sugar per 100 ml compared to a flavoured, sweetened milk that could contain 2.5 teaspoons or more per 100 ml (100 ml is less than ½ cup).

22. What about 100 per cent fruit juice, even freshly extracted juice? Is that a healthy option?

100 per cent juice is more nutritious than sugar-sweetened fruit drinks, but it's high in kilojoules from natural sugars found in fruit. For instance, it takes about two to four medium oranges (depending on the size and 'juiciness' of the oranges) to make 250 ml of orange juice. Furthermore, extracted juice does not contain the fibre that is found in fruit. Because of this, rather stick to a small glass, about ½ a cup (125 ml) of juice. Also try diluting 100 per cent juice with water or soda water to cut down on sugar and kilojoules. It is still best to enjoy a whole piece of fruit, which has the added benefit of fibre!

23. Are sport drinks healthy options when one exercises?

Water is still the best option before, during and after exercising. Sport and energy drinks are flavoured drinks that are high in sugar. Furthermore, energy drinks contain high amounts of caffeine and other substances that can be harmful when consumed in excessive amounts. The bottom line is that water and a nutritious meal is all you need to stay healthy and safe during exercise.

24. What about diet drinks or artificially sweetened drinks?

Artificially sweetened drinks contain no sugar, which means they are a better short-term choice than sugary drinks. If someone is used to regularly drinking sugary drinks, then artificial sweeteners or artificially sweetened drinks are a good step to cutting down. This does not mean artificial sweeteners or artificially sweetened drinks are healthy, as they still taste very sweet and cravings for sweet foods can continue. Artificially sweetened drinks therefore should not be part of a long-term healthy eating plan.

25. What about other beverages such as coffee or tea?

Coffee and tea, with the exception of Rooibos and herbal teas contain caffeine, which is a stimulant. It is also a diuretic and stimulates urination. The intake of caffeine should not be more than 400 mg per day. Coffee contains about 60 – 180 mg of caffeine and tea about 14 – 70 mg of caffeine. This translates into two to three cups of coffee or five to six cups of tea. Tea also contains tannins which are not always beneficial and interfere with the absorption of certain nutrients such as iron.

Furthermore, the addition of coffee creamers or tea whiteners, cream and/or any type of sugar can turn tea and coffee into less healthy drinks.

26. Why should anyone decide what I can eat or drink?

What you eat and drink is your choice. We would like to give you the facts on how to make an informed decision on what is healthy and why other alternatives are not so healthy. It is important to take note that the heavily-advertised beverages are the single largest driver of the obesity epidemic, and that there are tasty, healthier alternatives.

27. Where can one get more information about NNW 2017?

www.nutritionweek.co.za

The Department of Health: www.health.gov.za

Telephone numbers:

National	012 - 395 8770
Western Cape	021 - 583 5663/2275
Eastern Cape	040 - 608 1705
Northern Cape	053 - 830 0551
KwaZulu-Natal	033 - 395 2326
Free State	051 - 408 1281/1896
Gauteng	011 - 355 3551
North West	018 - 397 2364
Mpumalanga	013 - 766 3413
Limpopo	015 - 293 6198

The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA): www.adsa.org.za; info@adsa.org.za

Telephone: 011 - 061 5000

The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA): www.cansa.org.za; Telephone: 0800 226672

The Nutrition Society of Southern Africa (NSSA): www.nutritionssociety.co.za

Telephone: 082 667 4723

The Heart and Stroke Foundation: www.heartfoundation.co.za;

Heart and Stroke Health Line: 0860 1 HEART (43278)