Rethink Your Drink

In February it seems like almost everyone is trying to shed lingering holiday pounds and dreaming of being a bit lighter in the coming warm months. If you are one of those people then one of the ways to shed a bit of unwanted weight is to reduce the amount of calories that you consume in drinks. The following tips are good reminders that making smart decisions and small changes can easily result in pounds lost.

Hydration is Critical

Don’t drink less drink smarter. It is important to keep your body hydrated. You can only live a short time without fluid. Beverages are made up mostly of water but can also be loaded with added sugar and fat, and are often served in large portions. Too much dietary sugar and fat can lead to being overweight and to obesity, which are risk factors for heart disease, some cancers, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.

That Hidden Sugar!

People often do not realize the amount of sugar in beverages because they can’t see it and are accustomed to the flavor. Juice, fruit drinks, punch and soda all contain high amounts of sugar.

The sugar in 100% fruit juice is natural fruit sugar. One half (1/2) cup of 100% juice counts as ONE fruit serving. One hundred percent fruit juices contain essential vitamins and minerals for good health. For example, citrus juices contain Vitamin C which helps fight infection, increase the use of iron from food, and heal bruises and cuts. Read the label to be certain it is 100% fruit juice. Keep in mind however, that even though the fruit sugar in 100% fruit juice is “natural” (not added), it has the same number of calories as the same measure of “added” sugar. Once a beverage is digested and broken down in the body, the sugar (natural or added) can be stored by the body as “extra weight”. In other words, too much 100% juice adds calories and extra pounds to a body! Also, some fruit juices have added sugar. Cranberry juice is an example. Read the ingredient label to see words that have “-ose” on the end (examples include fructose and sucrose) to tell if sugar has been added.

The sugar in fruit drinks, punch and soda is added sugar. These drinks are (mostly) water with a lot of added sugar (or sugar substitute) and flavoring. These are big sources of “empty calories” … and no nutrients! Consuming these beverages in place of “nutrient dense” ones (i.e. 100% fruit juice or milk): 1) replaces needed nutrients, 2) increases calories, and 3) increases the likelihood of developing dental cavities.

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Where’s the Fat?

The USDA recommends individuals consume “three” servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy products per day. Dairy products are great sources of calcium and Vitamin D. Calcium is a mineral that makes bones hard and dense. Examples of dairy products are milk, yogurt, and cheese.
The labels on milk cartons are often a source of confusion regarding the different levels of fat. Skim (or “fat-free”) milk and 1% are low-fat choices. And 2% and whole milk are not low-fat choices, but are high in fat and saturated fat. The carton or container will have “whole”, “2%”, “1%” or “skim” on the front. Read the ingredient list to see what “type” of milk is used (on any dairy product).

When deciding on what beverage to drink, choose at least eight-eight ounce cups of water each day. Have a glass of 1% or skim milk as one of the recommended three servings of dairy foods each day. Choose a 1/2 cup of 100% fruit juice as a fruit serving in place of punch, fruit beverage or soda. Making small consistent changes in your diet can add up to long-term weight loss.

Sources/References:
1. United States Department of Agriculture MyPyramid - www.choosemyplate.gov

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