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**BODY:**

A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the February issue of Pediatrics suggests that fruit juice, like soda and sweetened fruit drinks, may contribute to kids' excess weight.

Double or Nothing CDC epidemiologist Jean Welsh looked at consumption of sweet drinks -- including fruit juice, soda, Kool-Aid and Hi-C -- among a group of 10,904 Missouri preschoolers. Kids who were overweight or at risk of becoming so when the study began and who consumed one or two sweet drinks per day were about twice as likely to be overweight a year later as similar kids who drank fewer of these beverages. But kids who drank juice alone also paid at the scale: Overweight kids who drank fruit juice once or twice a day were 50 percent more likely to remain chubby as those who drank less juice. For normal-weight or underweight kids, the link between sweet-drink consumption and becoming overweight was not statistically significant. Welsh said more study is needed to pin down fruit juice's effect on weight.

But Wait Carol Freysinger, executive director of the Washington-based Juice Products Association, said careful reading of the study -- in keeping with other recent research -- reveals very little connection between fruit-juice consumption and overweight.

What's for Lunch? Bonnie Liebman, director of nutrition for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said water and skim milk are better drink choices for kids. While she said pure fruit juices beat fruit drinks such as Hi-C and Sunny Delight, which are mostly sugar and water, juice's high-caloric content (80 calories per six-ounce serving for orange juice, for instance) outweighs its nutritional benefit. Snack on whole fruit, which has fiber and is more filling, she advises. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that kids aged 1 to 6 drink no more than four to six ounces of juice a day; for kids 7 to 18, it's eight to 12 ounces. If your kid's gotta have juice, Liebman said, make it orange: It has more nutrients than apple or grape juice.

-- Jennifer Huget

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