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Juice Displaces Milk and Fruit in High School Lunches

Hartford, Conn. – High school students participating in school meal programs are less likely to select milk, whole fruit, and water when fruit juice is available, which on balance may decrease the nutritional quality of their lunches, according to a new study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

The National School Lunch Program reaches over 30 million students, and while fruits, vegetables, and dairy served in the school lunch undoubtedly contribute to a healthy diet, the appropriate role of juice in children’s diets has generated debate. Currently, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends that children aged 7-18 consume no more than 8 ounces of juice daily, and juice is permitted to be served as part of the National School Lunch Program only on certain days.

“Our findings suggest that on the days when juice is available as a choice in high school lunches, students do not select whole fruit and milk as often. This is a problem because compared to juice, milk and whole fruit are better sources of three nutrients of concern for adolescents – calcium, vitamin D, and fiber,” says Marlene Schwartz, Director of the UConn Rudd Center and co-author of the study.

The study, published in the [Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior](#), utilized cafeteria register data from 3 low-income, Northeast high schools over one school year to determine whether high school students select different meal options on days when juice is available. The study also looked at the sales of à la carte beverages, which included both water and 100% juice.

Key findings include:

- On juice days, 9.9% fewer milks and 7.4% fewer whole fruit servings were selected with lunches.
- 8.2% fewer bottles of water and 24.4% fewer bottles of 100% juice were sold à la carte when juice was offered.

“The potential nutritional impact of these substitutions is important to consider. For instance, an 8-ounce serving of apple juice has no vitamin D, 285 fewer grams of calcium, and 116 fewer grams of potassium compared to an 8-ounce serving of 1% milk,” says Rebecca Boehm, lead author of the study and a University of Connecticut Postdoctoral Fellow with the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity and the Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy.

Support for this research was provided by the Healthy Eating Research Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Study co-authors include Rebecca Boehm, Postdoctoral Fellow with the UConn Rudd Center and the Zwick Center for Food Resource Policy, Marlene Schwartz, UConn Rudd Center Director and Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, and Margaret Read, Research Associate at the UConn Rudd Center.

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About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a multi-disciplinary center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. For more information, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org, follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter.