

Should I be concerned about selling sugary drinks and foods to students?

Fundraising can play an important role in schools, including increasing resources to purchase equipment and provide enriching school experiences. They can also be a fun way to build community connections, learn about other cultures and explore new foods.

However, when using foods and beverages to raise money, there can be a conflict between increasing revenue and promoting health. Some foods and drinks used as fundraisers are not health-promoting choices. This article responds to frequently asked questions from parents and school staff about using sugar-sweetened beverages and foods high in sugar for fundraising and provides other alternatives to explore when planning school fundraising campaigns and events.

What are sugary drinks?

[Sugary drinks](#) can include sweetened powdered drinks, lemonade, fruit juice, fruit punch, pop, commercial smoothies, sweetened tea or coffee, sports drinks, energy drinks, and other beverages with added sugar or other sweeteners.

What foods are considered high in sugar?

For most packaged products, the definition of “high” means that the food or beverage contains 15% or more of the [Daily Value](#) for sugars per serving. Many packaged foods such as cookies, chocolate bars and other candy bars are high in sugar. Store-bought baked goods such as donuts, cookies and cakes can also contain high amounts of sugar.

What are the health impacts of excess sugar consumption?

According to Health Canada, consuming too many added sugars has been linked to an increased risk of tooth decay in children and excess energy consumption which can increase the risk for chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, some types of cancers, and cardiovascular disease. Enjoying sugary drinks or sweet foods occasionally may not harm your health. What matters most is your overall diet. However, when sugary drinks and foods replace healthier choices too often, it can cause health problems over time.

Selling sugar-sweetened beverages and foods high in sugar at school

Nutritious foods are important for healthy growth and development. School food programs can provide students access to nutritious foods, supporting their overall health, wellbeing and readiness to learn and play. When schools/PACs regularly sell foods and drinks high in sugar to students, this environment makes it more difficult to choose nutritious food and beverage options provided.



Schools can create policies and environments that support healthy food and beverage choices such as:

- Ensure students and staff have access to water.
- Offer more nutritious alternatives. Ideas can be found in [General Nutrition Information - BC School Food Toolkit](#).
- Recommend unsweetened milk and fortified plant-based beverages.
- Consider how marketing affects children and youth, [Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children and Youth](#).
- Restrict marketing of sugary drinks at school-related events.
- Focus on inclusive and positively framed policies (i.e. health and access for all). Using a comprehensive school health approach, work towards promoting healthy environments, access to nutritious choices, and neutral language when talking about food.

Fundraising Ideas for PACs and Schools

The BC School Food Toolkit provides creative, health-promoting alternative fundraisers that may appeal to families, [School Fundraisers - BC School Food Toolkit](#).

Making decisions--Some questions that PACs can ask themselves:

- 1) Does this fundraiser align with health goals and with our PAC's values?
- 2) What are our goals in doing this fundraising activity?
- 3) What are the benefits and risks?
- 4) How can our fundraiser contribute to creating a healthier school food environment?
- 5) Could we sell fewer sugary food and drinks or sell them less often?
- 6) Is the fundraising activity inclusive of all students and families?

In summary, when deciding on fundraising activities, consider your group's goals, how inclusive your fundraising activities are, and the impacts of decisions on all students and families.

See also VCH's article, "[Should I be concerned about serving hot dogs at school?](#)"

If you have questions, please contact VCH Public Health Dietitians, VCHnutrition@vch.ca

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