

Nutritional value of milk drinks for young children

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Milk drinks for young children, i.e. toddlers, available on the market are referred to as toddler milk or children's milk. The manufacturers of these products often advertise these to be – in contrast to cow milk – adjusted to serve the specific nutritional needs of young children. These products thus often contain less protein than cow milk, allegedly in order to counteract obesity later in life. Instead they contain more vitamins and minerals, which is then said to be necessary for the adequate mental development of young children.

The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has reached the conclusion that these milk products for young children are not adjusted for the special nutritional needs of children ages one to three years. These therefore do not fulfil the requirements of the German regulation of dietetic foods.

On the contrary, since numerous milk drinks for young children are enriched with nearly all vitamins and minerals, they actually contribute to the uncontrolled increased intake of nutrients in young children. On the other hand, they contain relatively lower amounts of micronutrients than those, for example of calcium and vitamin B2, contained in cow milk. Whether a reduced concentration of protein in milk drinks for young children as compared to that in cow milk leads to significantly reduced protein intake per day is questionable. Furthermore, the scientific evidence to indicate that reduced protein intake during early childhood will reduce the risk of overweight and obesity in later childhood is insufficient at present. In addition, the fat content in milk drinks for young children, which is approximately comparable to that of whole milk, does not correspond to recommendations by paediatricians and nutritional physicians, who recommend that children drink milk with a reduced fat content. Producers of milk drinks for young children also often recommend high portion sizes on the packages of their products. If these are followed, children take in high amounts of macro- and micronutrients. Within their total diet, this promotes a long-term oversupply of all nutrients. This is problematic in terms of nutritional physiology and health.

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