CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Howard County moms and dads are doing their best to set their kids on the right path to happy, healthy lives. But it’s not always easy.

A growing number of parents are increasingly concerned about sugary drinks and the empty calories they contain.

These parents have good reason to be concerned: one in four Maryland children and one in four Howard County children is overweight or obese. Childhood obesity has almost tripled in the past 30 years, and 20 percent of the U.S. weight problem is attributable to sugary drinks.

Moms and dads are also concerned that sugary drinks make life more difficult for their families in other ways. Kids who drink sugary beverages have a harder time falling asleep, attention spans suffer, cavities increase, and worst of all, once kids start drinking sugary drinks, many have a hard time cutting back – almost like they are addicted.

So here is one simple thing every parent can do that is guaranteed to improve your children’s health: Buy healthier drinks for your home.

But who has time to find healthier and convenient alternatives to sugary drinks? You do!

We are making it easier for parents to do the right thing, to make better beverage choices and help keep their kids and families healthy.

Howard County. Unsweetened. (HoCo Unsweetened.org) will help parents identify better drink choices and where to find them.

As part of this effort, we’ve created the “Better Beverage Finder,” which lets moms and dads search for beverage choices any parent can love, and shows you how easy it is to find them in Howard County.

This user-friendly tool features more than 300 beverage options that are low in sugar, good and even great for you and your kids. Multiple search options and filters let parents decide what “better beverage” means for their family. It will then help you find drinks that fit those criteria. This tool was created with guidance from experts at the Yale University’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity.

HoCo Unsweetened.org also features a blog for parents to help other parents keep our kids healthy, resources you can print, share or “Pin,” cool videos, and helpful tips on how to read a drink label, make spa water, and enjoy less-sugary alternative drinks during the holidays.

In addition to the website, the campaign will include active social media communities, local media outreach and advertising. To learn more or get involved, visit HoCo Unsweetened.org and follow us on Twitter @HoCo Unsweetened.
WHY FOCUS ON SUGARY DRINKS?

Everyone knows that diet and exercise are important to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. But experts have cautioned that we cannot turn the childhood obesity problem around if kids continue to drink the same amount of sugary drinks as they do today. Parents have the power to change this. If we take just one simple step – buy healthier drinks for the home – we would be setting our kids on the path to a better future.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

We are hyper focused on helping moms and dads. Most parents already know that sugary drinks have bad health effects, impact their family life, and contribute to weight gain. Most parents are actively trying to make good choices for their families. But finding healthy drink choices for your children isn't always easy. That's why a cornerstone of this campaign is the Better Beverage Finder, which makes it easy for parents to sort through hundreds of low-sugar, low calorie drink options and know where to find them.

Howard County. Unsweetened. will be the most evaluated sugary drink campaign in the country. We’ll be extensively measuring our work and outcomes with the help of Yale University’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, including sales and in-store promotions data, student BMI measurements and surveys, surveys of local pediatricians, dentists and physicians, and interviewing child care providers. Lessons learned here in Howard County will help shape other efforts around the country.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

A second major thrust of the campaign will be the creation of the Better Choices Coalition of Howard County, a broad-based group of individuals and organizations that will be working to fill the county’s public spaces with better drink choices. This effort will include:

- Supplying better beverage choices at meetings and events.
- Providing better drink options in vending machines, cafeterias, and break rooms.
- Supporting public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption.

DUMP SUGAR! VISUAL

The 9.6 tons of dumped sugar (actually white sand) dumped by Burleigh Manor Middle School students represents the approximate amount of sugar the school’s student body would not consumer if each student drank one less 12-ounce soda a day for a year.

Following the event, the nearly 10 tons of sand is being donated to the Columbia Association, a nonprofit that maintains more than 93.5 miles of walking, jogging and biking pathways, and 3,500 acres of open space for area residents to enjoy.

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