

Sugar, How Sweet It Is...Or Is It?

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The bitter (sweet) truth about sugar.

Why so much fuss about sugar? First it was the craze to reduce fat in our diets in order to reduce the calories. And now it seems that almost everyone is afraid to eat even one extra gram of fat (and we all know the sources of fatty foods such as french fries, hamburgers and potato chips). As a result, we are now actually eating more sugary foods in place of those higher fat foods. Just look at any grocery store shelf and you will notice all those low-fat versions of cookies, cakes, ice creams, desserts and candies. The problem arises when fat is cut from these foods, the manufacturers use more sugar to improve the flavor.



What are the “good” sources of sugars?

Good sources of sugar come from complex carbohydrate foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads, cereals, pasta, milk and milk products like yogurt (milk actually contains its own natural sugar called “lactose”). All of these provide excellent sources of carbohydrates that turn very nicely into glucose fuel. These sources also come packed with vitamins, minerals, fibers and other healthy ingredients.

Where are the “bad” sugars?

The “bad” sources—and the excessive amounts—are in the sugars that are added to sodas, fruit drinks and other sweetened beverages (that are not 100% juice), cookies, cakes, sweetened cereals, desserts, candies, ice cream, etc. In other words, a lot comes from the processed foods that we eat. However, most people get too much dietary sugar from sodas.



What is sugar?

Sugar is actually a type of simple carbohydrate that very quickly turns into glucose—the fuel that runs your body. Your muscles, brain and just about every part of your body needs glucose to run.

So why is sugar bad for you?

If you do not have diabetes (a disease where your body can not process sugar efficiently) then sugar is not very bad. The problem is that there is just TOO MUCH added sugar in our daily diet. And too much can trigger your body to store the sugar in your fat cells—and you know the rest. Sugary foods also take the place of the healthier ones that supply vitamins, minerals, fiber and other good things. And, let's not forget that sugars can definitely do damage to your teeth.

What are the added sugars?

Try looking at a food ingredient label and you'll find that sugar comes in the form of sucrose, fructose, inverted sugar, dextrose, sugar, corn sweeteners, beet sugar, honey, and so on.

Don't be confused!

Unfortunately, food labels DO NOT separate the sugars that are found NATURALLY in the food, and those sugars that are added. So how can you tell the difference between added sugars and natural ones? The key is to look for the sweeteners on the ingredient label.

If the food product is a cookie, sweetened cereal, dessert, a non-fruit sweetened drink, soda, (in other words, a processed food) use the three to six grams of sugar per serving rule and you might be able to avoid becoming a “20 teaspoon a day” statistic. Remember the “good sources” for providing the fuel that your body needs, and then see how naturally sweet life can be.

How much is too much?

A good rule of thumb is to read the food label on the package of a processed food. For one portion, choose

something that has less than three to six grams of sugar per serving unless it is a milk product (such as yogurt) or fruit (whole fruit or juice). Milk products and fruit have lots of their own natural sugar that are not added. For example, fruit juice can have up to 29 grams of its own natural sugar per eight oz., and yogurt may have 25 grams of natural sugar (lactose).

Have you ever wondered how much sugar you really eat in a day, a week, a year? Well, new research shows that sugar consumption has now reached an all-time high. The average teenager consumes over 20 teaspoons of added sugars per day (that could be 20% of your total calories) and possibly over 150 pounds of added sugars in one year!