

Limit Sugar

Sugar contributes calories (energy) but few, if any, nutrients. Sugars and starches supply energy to the body in the form of glucose, which is the only energy source for red blood cells. Glucose is also the preferred source of energy for the brain, central nervous system, placenta and fetus.

A key recommendation of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is to choose and prepare foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners. No recommendations have been made for the total sugar intake in a day; therefore, there is no daily reference value (% Daily Value).

Your body responds to all sugars in the same way, regardless of whether they are naturally present (e.g. lactose in milk and fructose in fruit) or added to food.

WHAT ARE ADDED SUGARS?

Added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added to foods during processing or home preparation—fruit canned in heavy syrup, chocolate milk, soft drinks, sweetened cereal, candy, jams, jellies, and sugar added at the table. This does not include naturally occurring sugars, such as those in milk and fruits.

U.S. consumers eat about 74 pounds of added sugars per year. That’s about 23 teaspoons every day, or 460 calories that supply no additional nutrients. Much of the sugar in our diets is hidden.

Non-diet soft drinks are the number one source of added sugars in the U.S. Other major sources include candies, cakes, cookies, fruit drinks and fruitades. Consuming too many calories from these items may contribute to weight gain or result in eating less of the nutrient-dense foods.

Names for Added Sugars

Here are some of the names for added sugars that may be in processed foods and listed on the ingredients list of food labels.

Names for Added Sugars	
Brown sugar	Invert sugar
Corn sweetener	Lactose
Corn syrup	Maltose
Dextrose	Malt syrup
Fructose	Molasses
Fruit juice concentrates	Raw sugar
Glucose	Sucrose
High fructose corn syrup	Sugar (white)
Honey	Syrup

Where are the Added Sugars?

The following foods and beverages each contribute more than 5 percent of the added sugars to the American diet.

Major Sources of Added Sugars	
Food Categories	% of Total Added Sugars Consumed
Regular soft drinks	33.0
Sugars and candy	16.1
Cakes, cookies, pies	12.9
Fruit drinks (fruitades and fruit punch)	9.7
Dairy desserts and milk products (ice cream, sweetened yogurt and sweetened milk)	8.6
Other grains (cinnamon toast, sweet rolls and honey-nut waffles)	5.8

Source: Guthrie and Morton, *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 2000.

FIND SUGARS ON FOOD LABELS

Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label, a tool to help you make smart food choices quickly and easily. Use the label to identify foods and beverages with little added sugars.

Sugars are included in the Total Carbohydrate along with dietary fiber. The sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts label include both naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruits and milk) and those added to a food or drink.

Compare Two Yogurt Labels

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration provides this comparison of two yogurts. The plain yogurt, which contains 10g of sugars, has no added sugar. However, the fruit yogurt does have added sugar, accounting for 44g of sugars in one serving.

Fruit Yogurt	
Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 container (227g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 240	Calories from Fat 25
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 3g	4 %
Saturated Fat 1.5g	9 %
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 15mg	5 %
Sodium 140mg	6 %
Total Carbohydrate 46g	15 %
Dietary Fiber Less than 1g	3 %
Sugars 44g	
Protein 9g	
Vitamin A 2 %	Vitamin C 4 %
Calcium 35 %	Iron 0 %

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Fruit yogurt: contains added sugars.

Ingredients: cultured grade A reduced fat milk, apples, **high fructose corn syrup**, cinnamon, nutmeg, natural flavors, and pectin

The fruit yogurt does have added sugar, which is in the form of high fructose corn syrup. This accounts for 44g of sugars in one serving.

The serving size of the plain yogurt (226g) and the fruit yogurt (227g) are comparable in size. Always compare the stated serving size on the food label to the amount that you actually eat. If you eat twice the stated serving size, then you will consume twice the calories.

Which Yogurt Should You Choose?

Either yogurt might be a satisfactory choice for you, depending on your overall food choices and calorie needs. Remember that when a dairy or fruit product cites “sugars” on the Nutrition Facts label, it does not mean there are **added** sugars, unless a form of sugar is included in the ingredients list.

NEW DATABASE FOR ADDED SUGARS

The new online “USDA Database for the Added Sugars Content of Selected Foods” alphabetically lists foods within 23 groups, such as “Baked Products,” Fast Foods,” and “Snacks.” Go to: www.ars.usda.gov/Services/docs.htm?docid=12107

Plain Yogurt	
Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 container (226g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 110	Calories from Fat 0
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0 %
Saturated Fat 0g	0 %
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol Less than 5mg	1 %
Sodium 160mg	7 %
Total Carbohydrate 15g	5 %
Dietary Fiber 0g	0 %
Sugars 10g	
Protein 13g	
Vitamin A 0 %	Vitamin C 4 %
Calcium 45 %	Iron 0 %

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Plain yogurt: contains no added sugars.

Ingredients: cultured pasteurized grade A nonfat milk, whey protein concentrate, pectin, carrageenan

The list of ingredients for the plain yogurt does not include any added sugars. This means that the 10g of sugars listed are naturally occurring sugars (lactose in the milk).

SUGAR IN SOFT DRINKS

Regular soft drinks are the major source of refined sugars in our diets. They contain the following amounts of sugar:

- 12 ounce can - 10 teaspoons sugar
- 20 ounce bottle - 17 teaspoons sugar
- 32 ounce cup - 27 teaspoons sugar, or 9 tablespoons
- 64 ounce super sized cup - 53 teaspoons sugar. That is almost 18 tablespoons, or more than 1 cup of sugar!

SUGAR IN DISCRETIONARY CALORIES

“Discretionary” calories are the “extra” calories that you can consume above the “essential” calories needed to keep your body functioning and provide energy for physical activities. These include calories from all added sugars, as well as those from alcohol and most solid fats. Discretionary calories also can be used on eating more food from any food group than is recommended by MyPyramid, USDA’s latest food guide (e.g. lean meats, whole grains, milk, vegetables and fruits).

Most discretionary calorie allowances are very small, between 100 and 300 calories daily, especially for those who are not physically active. Many people use all of their discretionary calorie allowance on the foods they choose in each food group, such as sweetened bakery products, higher fat meats, cheeses, or whole milk.

For example, assume your calorie budget is 2,000 calories per day. You need to spend at least 1,735 of these calories for essential nutrients, choosing foods without added sugar and fat.

That leaves you only 265 discretionary calories, which may be used on “luxury” versions of the foods in each group, such as sweetened cereal or higher fat meat. Or, you could splurge on sweets, sauces or beverages.

Many people overspend their discretionary calorie allowance by choosing more added sugars, fats and alcohol than their calorie budget allows. At calorie levels lower than 2,000 per day, it is very important to focus on those no-added-sugar and fat-free choices for most of the foods eaten.

To raise your level of discretionary calories, you must increase your physical activity. If you eat 100 more food calories a day than you burn in physical activity, then you will gain about one pound per month, or about 10 pounds in a year.

SUGAR AND YOUR HEALTH

Sugar does not cause diabetes, make you fat, trigger hypoglycemia or hyperactivity, nor is it a risk factor for hypertension and heart disease. After numerous scientific studies, nutrition and health experts have concluded that tooth decay (dental caries or cavities) is the only health problem directly related to sugar consumption.

TOOTH DECAY

Foods containing sugars and starches can promote tooth decay. The more often you eat these foods and the longer they remain in your mouth before brushing your teeth, the greater the risk of developing dental caries (cavities).

Eating or drinking sweet or starchy foods between meals is more likely to harm teeth than eating the same foods at meals and brushing your teeth afterwards. Sugar that remains on the teeth is of more concern than the amount of sugar consumed.

WAYS TO CUT DOWN ON SUGAR

Since sugar contributes calories with few, if any, nutrients, always look for foods and beverages with little or no added sugars. It takes some planning to avoid high sugar choices.

Try these tips:

- Don’t sugarcoat it. Learn to enjoy foods that are naturally sweet, without added sugar.
- Celebrate special events with foods that are not high in sugar. For example, replace the frosted birthday cake with sponge cake topped with fresh fruit.
- Choose fresh fruits or canned fruits packed in water rather than in syrup.
- Always keep healthful snacks handy at home, at work, in your purse or briefcase.
- When grabbing lunch on the go, have a sandwich on whole-grain bread and choose low-fat/fat-free milk, water, or other drinks without added sugars.
- Pack a bottle of ice water or frozen 100% fruit juice in your lunchbox.

- On a long commute or shopping trip, pack some fresh fruit, cut-up vegetables, string cheese sticks, or a handful of unsalted nuts. This will help you avoid impulsive, less healthful sugary snacks.
- Choose fewer foods high in sugars, like candy, sweet desserts, soft drinks and other sweetened beverages. Good substitutes for cookies are: popcorn, vanilla wafers, graham crackers, low-fat cheese, raw vegetables, and unsweetened, low-fat yogurt flavored with fresh fruit, cinnamon or nutmeg.
- Drink water (unsweetened sparkling and mineral waters) or 100% fruit juices instead of Kool-Aid, fruit flavored drinks, sweetened tea, or soft drinks.
- Go easy on sugars added to foods in cooking or at the table—sugar and jelly.
- Use spices and herbs such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and ginger to enhance the flavor of foods.
- Instead of table sugar, sweeten cereals and baked goods with fruit (dried or fresh) or frozen fruit juice concentrates. However, be aware that sugar often improves the taste of some nutritious foods that otherwise might not be eaten (e.g. presweetened cereals and sweetened dairy foods).
- Buy fewer foods high in sugar—prepared baked goods, cookies, candies, soft drinks.
- Read food labels. Check the ingredients list, making sure that added sugars are not listed as one of the first three ingredients.
 - The ingredients list is usually located under the Nutrition Facts label or on the side of a food label.
 - Ingredients are listed in descending order of weight, or from most to least. That is, the ingredient with the greatest contribution to the product is listed first, and the ingredient contributing the least amount is listed last.
- Beware of other names for added sugars on food labels, such as: sucrose, glucose, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, fructose and maple syrup.
- Be careful not to replace foods high in sugar with foods high in fat and sodium.

CONCLUSION

An eating plan that helps you and your family maintain a healthy weight is one that focuses on getting plenty of nutrients within your calorie needs.

Studies show that people who consume many foods and drinks with added sugar tend to consume more total calories than people who do not. There is also a link between weight gain and drinking sweetened beverages. Therefore, to maintain a healthy weight, cut back on added sugars, especially from sweetened beverages like regular soft drinks and fruit punch.

Foods with added sugars and fat can be eaten as part of a diet that promotes good health, but they must be eaten less often. Visualize these foods at or near the TIP of the appropriate food group band on USDA's latest food guide, MyPyramid.

Sources:

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