

## Is your family's diet sugar-coated? Keep an eye on labels to prevent overload

Sugar has become a standard part of the American family's diet, and it sneaks its way into more food and beverages than most people realize.

The average American consumes 22.2 teaspoons (88.8 grams, or nearly half a cup) of sugar a day (equivalent to 355 calories), according to a 2009 study by the American Heart Association (AHA)

That's well above AHA recommendations that indicate women should consume no more than 100 calories of sugar daily and men no more than 150. This translates into 6.25 teaspoons (25 grams) of sugar for women and 9.375 teaspoons (37.5 grams) for men.

Children should watch their sugar intake as well. The limit for children during preschool and early elementary years should be 3 to 4 teaspoons (12 to 16 grams), and tweens and teens shouldn't consume more than 8 teaspoons (32 grams) a day.

### Is all sugar the same?

It's important to note that not all of the sugar in a person's diet is added to the foods we eat. Naturally occurring sugars, such as fructose in fruit and the lactose in milk, are a natural part of these foods. Added sugars, however, are an ingredient that's included in processed and prepared food and beverages.

Natural sugars are better than added sugars because they are easier for the body to break down and digest. Added sugars are not beneficial and should be consumed in moderation.

Since the grams of sugar listed on a nutrition label includes both naturally occurring and added sugars, it can be tricky to determine which ones are added and which are natural. A closer look at the ingredient list can help you determine whether a food's sugar content comes from natural or added sugars.

### Other names for sugar

Sugar can be cunningly concealed on a label under a variety of names including:

- Corn sweetener
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Sugar varieties ending in "ose" (dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose)
- Molasses
- Fruit juice concentrates

## Finding the sugar

Sugar provides no nutritional value, but does make an impact on a person's health. It can contribute to weight gain and negatively affect heart health; and a sugar-laden diet is associated with diabetes. In addition, researchers have found a link between sugar and low HDL ("good") cholesterol levels.

Although it has not been proven that people can become addicted to sugar, consuming large amounts on a daily basis can cause the body to crave it even more, making it harder to cut back.

To understand how many calories come from sugar in your favorite foods, check the nutrition facts label. There are 4 calories in every gram of sugar, so an item with 20 grams of sugar has 80 calories coming from that sweetener.

It can be easy for sugar intake to stack up during the day, but reading the nutrition labels on food and drink items can bring a heightened sense of awareness of what really is inside a package.

Foods that contain high amounts of **calories from added sugar** include:

<u>Food/Beverage</u>	<u>Calories from sugar</u>	<u>Grams of sugar</u>	<u>Teaspoons of sugar</u>
Carbonated beverage, cola, 12 oz	159.12	39.78	9.95
Mixed fruit, canned, light syrup, 1 cup	146.72	36.68	9.17
Chocolate ice cream, 1 cup	133.92	33.48	8.37
Yogurt, fruit variety, nonfat, 6 oz	129.2	32.3	8.08
Orange juice, 8.45 oz	98.68	24.67	6.17
Granola cereal, 8 oz	97.6	24.4	6.1
Lowfat blueberry muffin, commercially prepared, 1 muffin	76.84	19.21	4.8
Bran flakes cereal with raisins, 1 cup	73.88	18.47	4.62

Rice bowl with teriyaki chicken, frozen entrée, 1 serving	41.52	13.84	3.46
Chocolate chip cookie, 1 cookie	50.2	12.55	3.14
Cinnamon raisin bagel	36	9	2.25

*Calorie amounts listed above reflect only the amount of sugar (in calories) for the indicated food or beverage, not the total calories.*

*\*Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

The numbers on the chart may be an eye-opener when it comes to revealing sugar's hiding places. To help curb sweet cravings, try these tips:

- Focus on eating natural sugars, such as those from fruits and vegetables;
- Swap out sugar for spices, like ginger, cinnamon, and nutmeg;
- Think twice before adding sugar to items consumed daily, such as coffee, tea, and cereal;
- Drink water, or sugar-free or low-calorie beverages;
- Pre-plan splurges and choose treats that are really worth it;
- Stash healthy snacks at work;
- Be cautious of sugary power bars or sports drinks;
- Seek out sugar substitutes in small doses;
- Limit consumption of alcoholic drinks.

While focusing on daily sugar intake might feel burdensome at first, making small changes, one at a time, can have a cumulative benefit. Being mindful of what you put into your body can help you form good habits and make it easier to cut down on sugar intake as time goes on.

The bottom line is that too much sugar is not a sweet deal at all. Reading nutrition labels to spot sugar that's hiding out in foods and beverages can be a helpful habit for creating a healthier diet.

## Online resources

### **Limit Fat and Sugar**

This site from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute provides tips for cutting back on the amount of sugar and fat in your family's diet.

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/eat-right/limit-fat-sugar.htm>

### **Making Healthier Food Choices**

This colorful tip sheet from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute offers ideas for parents on eating right while at home and when dining out.

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/downloads/tip\\_choices.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/downloads/tip_choices.pdf)

### **Nutrient Database for Standard Reference**

Find nutrient information on more than 8,000 foods on this website from the United States Department of Agriculture.

<http://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>

### **Consumption of Added Sugars Among U.S. Adults**

This data brief from the National Center for Health Statistics contains key findings relating to sugar consumption from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2005-2010.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db122.htm>