

SUGAR

It is the added sugar in the American diet, not the natural sugars found in fruit and dairy, that causes greatest concern. On average, we eat about 300 calories worth of added sugar daily – the equivalent of 31 pounds per year!

What is Added Sugar?

Added sugars are sugars that are either added during the processing of foods, or are packaged as such. This includes any type of refined or raw sugar, sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices. Though sugars like honey, maple syrup, coconut sugar and turbinado sugar are slightly better choices than refined white sugar, they are still considered added and need to be eaten in small amounts.

Is Sugar Toxic or Addictive?

There's been a lot of buzz in the news about sugar being a "toxic" substance that people abuse. Although "addiction" to sugar does not occur in the exact same ways as does addiction to drugs, there are some striking similarities. Eating sugar can cause neurochemical changes in the brain that also occur with addictive drugs. Animals can become sugar dependent and experience bingeing, withdrawal, and cravings, all behaviors that characterize addiction. The sugar "highs" and "lows" one can experience are likely the result of a sugar "dependency." In this case, the body gets accustomed to being fueled with a high level of sugar, so when you consume less, you feel out of sorts (withdrawal) – which causes you to crave more sugar and can lead to binges.

What are the Problems?

Although sugar might not be addictive by definition, overconsumption of refined and added sugar can promote obesity and other weight-related problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and coronary artery disease. Research shows that sugar is worse for your heart than salt. Dependency, binges and withdrawal can lead to changes in blood sugar that can disrupt sleep, fuel overeating and lead to fatigue. Your body doesn't require processed sugar, but it does need the sugar that comes from breaking down whole grains, fruits and starchy vegetables. Instead of shunning sugar altogether, avoid foods with added sugars. These foods have fewer vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and/or fiber – all of the most nutritious parts!

How to Proceed

The first step is to become aware of the refined or added sugars in the foods you eat!

A. Check the ingredient list:

When refined or added sugars are listed among the first few ingredients, you know the product is likely to be high in sugar.

Sugar can be listed on a label in any of these forms:
--

Agave nectar*	Honey
Brown sugar	Hydrolyzed starch
Cane sugar/evaporated cane juice	Invert sugar
Concentrated fruit juice sweetener	Lactose (“milk sugar”)
Confectioner’s sugar	Levulose
Corn syrup	Maltose
Corn sweeteners	Maple sugar
Dextrose	Molasses
Fructose (“fruit sugar”)	Powdered sugar
Galactose	Raw sugar
Glucose	Sucrose (“table sugar”)
Granulated sugar	Table sugar
High fructose corn syrup**	Turbinado

**Though agave is typically considered a healthy choice, there are better options out there, such as honey or maple syrup.*

***High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is a popular ingredient in sodas, fruity drinks, and other processed foods. It is unnatural and is always GMO. It can be in EVERYTHING from hot dogs to cereal to peanut butter to yogurt. Always steer clear. Regular consumption promotes obesity and other medical conditions.*

B. Check the nutrition information panel:

Look for total grams of sugar (listed under “Total Carbohydrate”) and added sugars, which is a new component of the updated nutrition panel.

- A product is high in sugar if it contains more than 15 grams of sugar per 100 grams.
- A product is low in sugar if it contains less than or equal to 5 grams of sugar per 100 grams.
- Expect that healthful foods such as dried fruit and whole grains may be considered high in sugar but the sugar comes in a healthful and nutrient dense form (assuming no added sugar!). These foods can still be incorporated into a healthy diet.
- Aim to consume as little added sugar as possible. There is no nutritional need for added sugar. The new Daily Value for added sugar is 50 grams, but I think this is still too much. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 25 grams of added sugar per day for women (6 teaspoons, 100 calories) and 36 grams per day for men (9 teaspoons, 150 calories). That is a better goal, although I still tell clients to aim for no added sugar at all.