

KEEPING AN EYE ON: Sugar

Natural Sugar

Sugar occurs naturally in small amounts in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and even skim milk – all foods that can be included in a heart-healthy diet. (Curious how much? A cup of watermelon balls contains about 2 ½ teaspoons of sugar, a cup of cooked broccoli about ¼ teaspoon, a cup of cooked brown rice about 1/5 teaspoon, and a cup of skim milk about 3 teaspoons.) In general, there’s no need to worry about the natural sugars in whole foods like these.

Added Sugar


However, additional sugar – which isn’t so sweet for our health - sneaks into our diets when we add sugar or other sweeteners to our foods during preparation or at the table, and when we eat many types of processed foods. The American Heart Association recommends that most women should eat no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugar per day (approximately 24 grams), and men 9 teaspoons per day (36 grams).

Women	Men
no more than	no more than
6	9
teaspoons of sugar per day	teaspoons of sugar per day

Generally, when we eat processed foods we consume more sugar than we realize. A 12-ounce carbonated soft drink alone can have up to 40 grams of sugar – that’s about 10 teaspoons, more if you’re drinking a full 20-ounce soda!

Hidden Sugar

You already know many foods that have the most added sugar; others (like yogurt) may surprise you:



Sweetened beverages: Sodas Fruitades Punches Sweetened milks	Sweetened yogurts	Ice cream Frozen yogurt	Sweetened cereals	Candy Cookies Cakes Pies
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Take an Inventory

Try this to see where added sugar may be lurking in your pantry: Take a quick inventory of the foods you eat to get a better understanding of how much sugar you may be eating on a daily basis. Take into consideration how much sugar you yourself add to your cereals, coffee, or tea – remember to include table sugar, honey, molasses and syrup (they’re all sugar!).

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Read Nutrition Labels and the Ingredient Lists on Food Packages.

If you see words like the following, you'll know there's sugar added to the product:

- brown sugar (and any other type of sugar)
- corn sweetener
- corn syrup
- fruit juice concentrates
- high-fructose corn syrup
- honey
- words ending in "ose" (dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose).

Grams of sugar
 $\div 4$

 teaspoons

The Nutrition Label will tell you how many grams of sugar per serving. To convert grams to teaspoons, divide the total number of grams of sugar by 4. If you eat more than the serving size you'll need to multiply the grams by the number of servings you're eating.

Once you've gotten a sense of where the excess sugar lurks in your diet, the easiest way to cut back is to eat more unprocessed food. There's no added sugar in a salad with home-made vinaigrette, or a stir-fry you create from leftover vegetables, a few shrimp and some brown rice.

Cutting Back on Sugar

Here are a few more tips to help you cut back on added sugar:

- **Buy sugar-free or low-calorie beverages**, or better yet, drink plenty of water. To add flavor, slice up a lemon or lime, and add to your water. Slices of cucumbers or herbs such as mint are also refreshing additions.
- **Buy fresh fruits or fruits canned in water or natural juice.** Avoid fruit canned in syrup, especially heavy syrup.
- **Add fresh fruit**, such as berries or bananas, to your oatmeal or other whole grain cereal. Dried fruits, such as raisins, dates, and apricots are an alternative. With the sweetness of fruit, you'll be able to skip the sugar bowl.
- **Enjoy unsweetened Greek yogurt for dessert.** Top with a few slices of fresh or frozen fruit. For a little crunch, add chopped unsalted walnuts or almonds.
- **Enhance foods with spices** like ginger, allspice, cinnamon or nutmeg instead of sugar.
- **Don't skip meals;** doing so can cause a drop in your blood sugar resulting in binging or opting for something sugary. Eat a balanced diet of vegetables, lean protein and whole grains. If you find you're hungry in between meals, enjoy a piece of fresh fruit, a bowl of yogurt, or a handful of nuts or seeds.

