Uncover the secret of hidden sugars

Learn to spot and stop filling up on added sugars



Over the past several decades, Americans, in general, have consumed more and more added sugars in foods and beverages. That's one of the reasons why nearly a third of U.S. adults are overweight or obese. Added sugars can also lead to type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

How much is too much sugar?

According to the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the goal of a healthy diet includes limiting the intake of added sugars to less than 10 percent of total daily calories. From 2003 to 2010, Americans over the age of 6 typically consumed about 14 percent of their daily calories from added sugars.

Sugar sources

Some sugars are found naturally in foods, such as fruit (fructose) and dairy (lactose). Other sugars are added to foods during preparation or processing. The most frequent sources of added sugars in U.S. diets come from sugary beverages, baked desserts, candy and dairy treats. Added sugars contain zero nutrients, but contribute unneeded calories to our diets.

To spot these added (hidden) sugars, you have to learn where to look and what to look for. The Nutrition Facts label on foods lists the amount of sugar in grams. This tells you exactly how much sugar you are consuming. You can also look at the list of ingredients to spot the added sugars. If an added sugar is listed among the top two or three ingredients, it is considered a main ingredient in the food. Examples of added (hidden) sugars on ingredient lists include corn sweetener, dextrose, maltose, sucrose, maple or brown sugar, corn syrup, high-fructose cane sugar, molasses, honey and fructose.

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Five surprise sources

Avoiding added sugars isn't necessarily as simple as cutting out sweets and sugary beverages. That is because sugar often is added to otherwise nutritious foods. You may be surprised to learn about some potential sources of added sugar:

1. Salad dressings and pasta sauces
2. Whole-grain cereals and granolas
3. Yogurt contains natural sugar in the form of lactose, but watch out for varieties of fruit-flavored yogurts, which may contain added sugar or corn syrup.
4. Dried fruit – some brands include added sugar
5. Barbeque and other grilling sauces, such as teriyaki or jerk

Put the brakes on sugar

When shopping, check the ingredient list for sugar or one of the "hidden" sugar aliases identified above. Make a goal to keep your intake of sugary drinks and foods each day at or below the Dietary Guideline recommendations. If you are concerned about excessive weight and/or potential health issues, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease, it may be time to take even more notice of your sugar intake.

Looking for a refreshing treat? Try replacing sugary drinks with water flavored with a slice of lemon, or have a piece of fresh fruit to satisfy a craving for something sweet.

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