



Sugar and Your Health

Can you satisfy your sweet tooth and eat a healthy diet? Believe it or not, you probably can. Sugar can be part of a healthy diet if used in moderation. But what is moderation? According to the Food Guide Pyramid, a person eating 2,200 calories a day should eat no more than 12 added teaspoons of sugar each day. You may not think you add that much sugar to your food, and you personally might not, but sugar might have been added in the processing.

The average American eats more than 32 teaspoons of added sugar each day.

Candy and cereal and other sweet foods contribute quite a bit of this sugar. However, catsup, salad dressing, barbecue-flavor potato chips and other foods you wouldn't normally consider sweets, often contain added sugar as well.

How can you tell if sugar has been added to a food? Check the Nutrition Facts label. "Total sugar" is listed on the Nutrition Facts label in grams. If you divide the number of grams by 4, you'll get the approximate number of teaspoons of sugar in the food. This does include natural sugar but if sugar is one of the first ingredients on the label, most of the sugar is probably added. All of these are sugar: brown sugar, sucrose, dextrose, high fructose corn syrup, molasses, maltose, and fructose. Here are some examples of the amount of sugar in several foods:

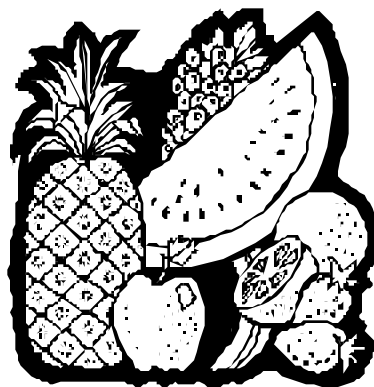
Food	Grams	Teaspoons
soft drink, 12 ounces	40 grams	10 teaspoons
chocolate candy bar, 1 1/2 ounces	22 grams	5 1/2 teaspoons
cake with icing	18 grams	4 1/2 teaspoons
fruit loop-type cereal (1 cup)	14 grams	3 1/2 teaspoons
sweet pickle, 1 ounce	9 grams	2 1/4 teaspoons
catsup, 1 tablespoon	4 grams	1 teaspoon
barbecued chips, 1 ounce	2 grams	1/2 teaspoon
unsweetened cereal, 1 cup	1 1/2 grams	1/3 teaspoon

Is sugar itself bad for you? Health concerns about sugar include its possible role in diseases like diabetes, obesity, hyperactivity and tooth decay. However, the only proven link is between sugar and tooth decay. In diabetes, the blood sugar (glucose) rises because it cannot get into the cells. But diabetes is not caused by eating a diet high in sugar. Being overweight increases the risk of diabetes, and eating too many calories leads to weight gain. Cutting down on the amount of sugar in your diet to lose weight may decrease your chances of getting diabetes, but eating sugar does not cause diabetes. Nor does eating a high-sugar diet cause children to become hyperactive, according to the current research. However, high sugar foods are often low in other important nutrients, and should be considered “occasional” foods for children. Tooth decay is a concern, so be sure to brush teeth after meals, and never put sweet liquids in a baby’s bottle.

Should you be concerned about the amount of sugar in your diet? Sugar is a carbohydrate, and carbohydrates are the major source of energy (calories) for your body. Many foods contain carbohydrates naturally, including bread, fruit, milk, and vegetables. These foods also contain many vitamins and minerals, along with the carbohydrate they contain, so they are a good nutrition bargain. Foods that are high in added sugar, however, such as sweet tea, candy, and soft drinks, are high in calories and very low in vitamins and minerals. Lots of sugar and few other nutrients makes these foods poor choices for the number of calories you are getting. Cutting down on high sugar, low nutrient foods make good sense from a nutrition standpoint, especially since most Americans get far more sugar in their diets than is recommended.

Make it a habit to satisfy your sweet tooth with fruit, which contains natural sugar, and is high in vitamins, and minerals.

And when nothing but chocolate will do, have a small piece or two, not the entire box!



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Gail Hanula, Eds, RD, LD Extension Nutrition – EFNEP Specialist
and Erica Aspinwall, Extension Graduate Assistant
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