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Are You Avoiding Some Healthy Foods Because of Sugar

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN
Extension Educator

Have you heard people say they no longer ate fruit or drank milk because these foods contained "sugar?" I started thinking of how many other foods people think they should avoid because of something they heard in the news.

The public has been hearing a lot about cutting back on sugar. What the recommendations from the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA2015) were talking about is "added" sugar, not the sugars found naturally in foods such as fruit and milk. "Added sugars" are those sugars added during processing or added when we eat, such as adding sugar to coffee.

Recommendations

The reason for the original recommendations wasn't because sugar is a "toxic" substance as some articles claim. Rather, excessive "added sugars" can:

- Contribute to excess calories — unless a person is very active — which may lead to weight gain and an increased risk of heart disease and diabetes.
- Provide calories but no additional nutrients. In turn, some people may reduce or avoid eating more nutrient-dense foods to avoid gaining weight. (See Table 1 comparing milk, fruit and regular cola.)
- Contribute to tooth decay.

The DGA2015 recommend consuming less than 10 percent of calories per day from added sugars for children and adults. This amount was chosen as — for most calorie levels — there aren't enough calories left after meeting food group recommendations to still stay within the limits of desirable calorie amounts. For a 2,000-calorie level, this amount would equal less than 200 calories of added sugar. As one example, 200 calories would equal approximately 12 teaspoons of granulated white sugar, a common source of sugar.

4 grams of granulated white sugar equals approximately 1 teaspoon of sugar

Does this mean you should never eat "added sugar." Not at all! Rather, limit the amount to assure getting adequate nutrients from more nutrient-dense foods in your diet. A small amount of sugar may help us consume disease-fighting foods, according to Jill Weisenberger, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Diabetes Educator. For example, think about eating cranberries "without some added sweetness," says Weisenberger.

Sources of "Added" Sugar

"About half the added sugars in our diets come from drinks — like sodas, fruit drinks and other sweetened beverages," according to the DGA2015.

Reading the list of ingredients on the label of processed

Table 1: Major Nutrient Comparison of Milk, Fruit and Cola

Nutrient	A typical serving size		
	Milk, nonfat, with added vitamin A & D, 1 cup	Oranges, raw, 1 large, 3-1/16 diameter	Cola, regular, 12 fluid ounces
Calories	83	86	155
Protein, g	8.3	1.7	0
Fiber, g	0	4.4	0
Sugars, g	12 (naturally occurring)	17.2 (naturally occurring)	36.78 (added)
Calcium, mg	200	74	4
Vitamin C, mg	0	97.9	0
Potassium, mg	382	333	0
Vitamin A, IU	500	414	0
Vitamin D, IU	115	0	0

Source of nutrients: USDA Food Composition Databases, retrieved 6/19/2017 at <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb>

foods can help identify added sugars. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) identifies the following names among those for added sugar on food labels: anhydrous dextrose, brown sugar, confectioner's powdered sugar, corn syrup, corn syrup solids, dextrose, fructose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, maple syrup, molasses, nectars (e.g., peach nectar, pear nectar), pancake syrup, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar and white granulated sugar.

Food labels list ingredients from most to least by weight.

Nutrition Facts Panel

At present, the Nutrition Facts panel on foods is not required to indicate whether sugars are added or naturally occurring in a food. This is what a current Nutrition Facts label might look like (Figure 1).

On May 27, 2016, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) published final rules in the Federal Register for a regulation that, "Added sugar,"

Figure 1. Sugar listing on current Nutrition Facts label

Amount Per Serving		% Daily Value*	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g) Servings Per Container about 2			
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110		
Total Fat 12g 18%			
Saturated Fat 3g 15%			
Trans Fat 3g			
Cholesterol 30mg 10%			
Sodium 470mg 20%			
Total Carbohydrate 31g 10%			
Dietary Fiber 0g 0%			
Sugars 5g			
Proteins 5g			

in grams and as percent Daily Value, will be included on the label." The compliance date was set for "...July 26, 2018, with an additional year to comply for manufacturers with annual food sales of less than \$10 million." After additional feedback from industry and consumer groups, FDA determined additional time would be needed for compliance with no final compliance date determined as of this writing.

Limit Fruit Juice

Fruit juice is an exception to eating less of a source of naturally-occurring sugar. USDA's MyPlate nutrition guidelines state, "Make most of your choices whole or cut-up fruit, rather than juice, for the benefits that dietary fiber provides."

In May 2017, The American Academy of Pediatrics recommended fruit juice should not be given to infants before 12 months of age unless clinically indicated. Juice should be limited to 4 ounces/day for toddlers 1-3 years of age; 4-6 ounces/day for children 4-6 years of age; and 8 ounces/day for youth 7-18 years of age. Excessive juice consumption was associated with tooth decay, diarrhea, flatulence and abdominal distension.

AAP further recommended toddlers shouldn't be given juice from bottles or easily transportable cups that allow them to consume juice throughout the day. Nor should toddlers be given juice at bedtime. Both practices increase the risk of tooth decay through a lengthy exposure to the sugar in fruit juice.

References for this article are online at <http://go.unl.edu/kr45>

FREE PROGRAM: "QUICK & HEALTHY NO-RECIPE MEALS"

Thursday, Aug. 17, 6:30-8 p.m.

Bryan East Campus, Plaza Conference Center, 1500 S. 48th St., Lincoln

Pre-registration is required by calling 402-481-8886

Learn how to use a few simple tips and techniques with a variety of ingredients to fix healthy meals in a hurry.

Presented by Alice Henneman, Extension Educator, RDN