



# Sugar



**Health**



**Wellness**



**Nutrition**



**Support**

# Introduction

Sugars can come in different forms. They can be found naturally in fruit or milk, or they can be added as an extra ingredient in different foods and drinks.

Sugar is always in the spotlight for media attention because of the high amounts we eat and drink in our diets.

Sugars are not necessarily the cause of weight gain, or why we struggle to lose weight, however.

All type of carbohydrates are broken down into the simplest form of sugar, called glucose. Understanding the type of sugar and where it came from is important to maintaining a healthy diet.

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## Where is the sugar in our diet?

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate more scientifically known as glucose. It's found naturally in some foods but can also be manufactured and added to foods.

If you looked at the different types of foods that make up a balanced diet, you'd find some form of sugar in every category. This makes avoiding sugar in a balanced diet difficult, if not impossible.

Since sugar is so difficult to avoid, rather than trying to limit it we need to think about what *type* of sugar we choose and the foods our sugar comes from.

The types of sugar we should be eating less of are 'free sugars'. These are absorbed quickly by our bodies and are fast releasing, causing spikes in hunger and cravings.

Free sugars include:

- **All added sugar in food and drinks.** These may be added in by food manufacturers, a chef, or by us at home, and include the sugars we would find in biscuits, chocolate, and other sweet foods.
- **Sugars in honey and syrups** like golden syrup or maple syrup and fruit juices.

It does not include:

- Naturally occurring **sugars from dairy foods** like milk or yoghurt, or **fresh and dried fruit and vegetables.**

Natural foods contain other essential nutrients, such as fibre, vitamins and minerals to provide us with a balanced diet. They break down more slowly in our bodies and support longer feelings of fullness.

## How do free sugars affect our health?

It's recommended that free sugars make up no more than five per cent of our total daily calories. This is the same as around 30g or about seven sugar cubes.

On average, however, we get 11 per cent of our calories from free sugars which is more than double the recommended amount.

Too much sugar affects our health in different ways. The main concerns are:

- Poor dental health
- Increased calorie intake and weight gain
- Reduction in other essential nutrients

The health risks from sugars are related to eating too many free sugars. We do not need to avoid or limit sugars that are naturally found in fruits and milk.

## Which food and drinks contain free sugars?

Free sugars are commonly found in everyday food and drink, including:

- Sugary drinks (including fizzy and energy drinks). These may be sweetened with sugar or a combination of sugars and sweeteners.
- Fruit drinks, juices and smoothies. These do contain some vitamins, minerals and natural sugars, but these still are still classed as free sugars and it's best to limit these to one small glass (150ml) a day.
- Sweet foods like biscuits, cakes, pastries, chocolate, desserts and sweets. These are made with free sugar, whether that is table sugar, fruit purees, syrups or honey.
- Honey and syrups like maple syrup or agave nectar. Even though these may be natural, they still contain free sugars.
- Fruit and flavoured yoghurts. These contain some natural sugars from milk or fruit but may also have some sugars added.

**Tip:** Sugar will not always be listed on food packaging as 'sugar'. Look at the ingredients list on the labels for sucrose, fructose, sugar syrups, dextrose or maltodextrin. Even if you cannot see the word 'sugar', be careful as it may just be listed differently.

## Sweeteners

Since the introduction of the UK sugar tax, 'diet' and 'sugar free' products are even more popular.

Sugar has been taken out of diet products, but usually replaced with sweeteners. For health and weight loss we should not be using sweeteners instead. Although sweeteners help to reduce free sugars, there is evidence to show sweeteners can cause harm and should be consumed in smaller amounts.

Food companies use sugar reduction as an opportunity to sound like a healthier product. Even though something is 'reduced sugar', this does not necessarily mean they are better for us. Foods and drinks from natural sources are always a better choice for health and artificial manufactured products should be reduced.



## How can we reduce our sugar intake?

The main sources of free sugars in our diets are sugary drinks like fizzy drinks, energy drinks, fruit juice, cakes, biscuits, desserts and sweets. Reducing intake of these foods and drinks may help us to reduce our free sugars intake.

Some things you could try are:

- ✓ Swap sugary drinks for sugar-free versions or water
- ✓ Swap sweet snacks for fruit
- ✓ Reduce the portion sizes of sweet foods like cakes, chocolate, biscuits or desserts
- ✓ Check the label of yoghurts for lower sugar, or try natural yoghurt
- ✓ Check labels when choosing breakfast cereals and go for those with less sugar
- ✓ Swap jams or chocolate spreads for peanut butter or mashed fruit
- ✓ Keep fruit juices or smoothies to one small glass (150ml per day)

You may not want to completely remove free sugars from your diet. Start with small changes such as reducing portions sizes or reducing the number of times you eat or drink a certain food in a week.

Free sugars provide lots of energy with little nutritional value. A diet low in free sugars will include healthy choices that provide us with fibre, vitamins and minerals that also satisfy us more. We should try to reduce our sugar intake, but also to think about what we can eat more of, such as fruit, vegetables and wholegrains.

## Final thought

Too much sugar in any form can be harmful to health,. By reducing our free sugar intake we make sure we are not adding unnecessary calories to our diets and eating more nutritious food.

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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