



FACTS ABOUT SUGAR

SO, WHAT EXACTLY IS SUGAR AND WHY IS IT BAD FOR US?

Sugar is a natural ingredient that has been part of our diet for thousands of years. Sugars are carbohydrates that provide energy for the body. The most common sugar in the body is glucose which your brain, major organs and muscles need to function properly.

Ok, that doesn't sound too bad right.... WRONG! Consuming too much sugar can cause tooth decay and weight gain. The types of sugars we have in our diets are known as "free" sugars:

- Any sugars added to food or drinks. This includes sugars in biscuits, chocolate, flavoured yoghurts, breakfast cereals and fizzy drinks.
- Sugars in honey, syrups (i.e., maple, agave, golden), nectars such as blossom, and unsweetened fruit juices, vegetable juices and smoothies. Although these sugars occur natural in these foods, they still count as free sugars.

The sugar found naturally in milk, fruit and veg does not count as a free sugar, but they still count toward our "total sugar" figure found on the food labels.

It is recommended by the Government that these free sugars only make up no more than 5% of the energy (calories) we get from food and drink daily. So as adults, we should be having no more than 30g of free sugars a day (roughly about 7 sugar cubes).

For instance - a can of coke can have up to 9 cubes of sugar!! So, bear that in mind next time you visit the vending machine!

Sugar can come in many forms: corn sugar, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high-fructose corn-syrup, honey, maple syrup, agave syrup, invert sugar, isoglucose, levulose, maltose, molasses, and sucrose.

Here are the main 5 sources of added sugars according to the National Diet and Nutrition Survey, and some of the main offenders:

1. SUGAR, PRESERVES AND CONFECTIONERY

A massive portion of the added sugar in our diets (about 27%) comes from chocolate, sweets, jams, and good old table sugar.

2. NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

This makes up at least 25% of our daily added sugar intake! A 500ml bottle of cola can have up to 17 cubes of sugar!! 100% pure unsweetened fruit juice is high in the sugars we need to be reducing (free sugars) However! Fruit juice still contains vitamins and minerals, so one glass (150ml) of unsweetened 100% fruit juice counts as one of your 5 A DAY. To reduce the risk of tooth decay, fruit juice is best enjoyed at mealtimes.

3. BISCUITS, BUNS & CAKES

These account for about 20% of our daily added sugar intake! The British are known to be a nation of "grazers" often reaching for something quick and comforting but that is high in sugar and fat.

4. ALCOHOL

This accounts for almost 11% of our daily added sugar intake. Tips to reduce this include switching to sugar-free mixers, swapping to lower alcohol content drinks and having a small bottle of beer instead of a can.

5. DAIRY & SAVOURY

These account for 6% and 5% respectively. Some of the worst dairy offenders include fruit yoghurt (16.6g/100g) and fruit fromage frais (13.3g/100g); some of the worst savoury offenders include tomato ketchup (27.5g/100g) and salad cream (16.7g/100g).

Over the past few decades, a rapid increase in sugar consumption has grown parallel with the development of obesity. It's now well established that sugar helps us develop cavities and gain weight. But what about all the other diseases that we have heard sugar is responsible for?



DOES SUGAR CAUSE DIABETES AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE?

When it comes to diabetes, a condition determined by too high blood sugar levels, it's easy to think that eating too much sugar would be an obvious cause. But things are a bit more complicated, as evidence linking sugar consumption directly to diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease is still insufficient.

However, even if sugar is not directly responsible for an increased risk of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes, obesity is a well-established risk factor for both conditions. This means that if we eat too much sugar and become overweight as a result, we are also going to increase our risk of developing those diseases.

IS SUGAR ADDICTIVE?

"Sugar affects our bodies like cocaine" so the saying goes, but let's check whether this theory is backed by solid evidence. An independent review, published in 2019, found little evidence to support the theory that humans become addicted to sugar. Furthermore, findings from animal studies suggested that addiction-like behaviours, such as bingeing, happened only when the animals were given intermittent access to sugar.

The addiction literature is complicated, many people believe that they are addicted to sugars and report symptoms like those of addicts to other substances. So, while the science might conclude that we don't become neurochemically addicted to sugar, there are still people who develop addiction-like symptoms who might need treatment.

DOES SUGAR FEED CANCER?

Some people say that cancer cells live off sugars, so many people believe that eating sugar will lead to feeding cancer cells. There are a few conceptual mistakes behind this belief. Cancer cells indeed live off one specific type of sugar, glucose, but that's also true

of healthy cells. All the cells in our body get energy from glucose. It's also important to note that all the food we eat is converted into glucose in one way or another in our body - not just foods that contain glucose. This aside, scientists have concluded that there's no evidence that "sugar-free" diets lower the risk of getting cancer or boosts the chances of surviving if you're diagnosed.

DOES SUGAR CAUSE INFLAMMATION?

Some researchers have suggested that dietary sugar intake could trigger more inflammation in our bodies, which could be linked to the development of various diseases. However, the studies trying to answer this question were often small and ended up reaching opposite conclusions. To draw more confident conclusions, further studies need to be carried out, with larger sample sizes and longer follow-up periods.

Obviously becoming overweight will add extra pressure onto our joints and may affect inflammation.

LIMITING OUR SUGAR INTAKE

Sugar is an interesting example of how scientific claims can be misused to influence policy and public opinion. On the one hand, the sugar industry attempts to make us believe that sugar is not linked to any negative side effects, not even oral health, and obesity. On the other, some researchers identify sugar as the sole culprit for many diseases.

The reality sits, as it is often the case, somewhere in between. Many diseases stem from the complex interactions of different factors in our lifestyles and diets. But the negative impact of the overconsumption of sugars is clear enough that we can be at least sure of something: Limiting our sugar intake can only be good for us.

