

SECONDARY STRATEGY # 2 – SUGAR – BEWARE OF EMPTY CALORIES

Sugar is one of the most commonly eaten substances; it is also the most common food additive. The average person eats about 150 grams (approximately one-third of a pound) of sugar, in one form or another, every day. This works out to about 60kg (approximately 130lbs) of sugar every year. That's enough to overfill a large wheelbarrow. Sugar is present in all kinds of foods - from candy to yogurt to breakfast cereals to ketchup to bread to soda pop to cakes to cookies and, well, you get the idea. If you pick up any processed, manufactured or packaged food at the grocery store, it's a pretty good bet that sugar (in one form or another) has been added to it.

Generally, sugar is eaten in two common ways:

- 1) Most sugar is eaten in foods where it is "hidden." In other words, the sugar is combined or blended right into the food itself. For example, candy, cakes, cookies, puddings, jams, soda pop, ketchup, peanut butter, yogurt, tomato sauce, bread, and breakfast cereal, have sugar that has been blended right in. In other words, in these types of processed foods, you don't even really "see" the sugar.
- 2) People also eat "added" sugar by putting it on food to make it taste sweeter. For example, sugar is added to things like breakfast cereal, coffee, tea or fruit.

Sugar comes in many different forms; the most common kind is sucrose or plain white table sugar. Other examples of sugar include: brown sugar, honey, maple syrup, molasses, icing sugar and corn syrup. The sugar that is added to processed foods can come in several forms as well: glucose, glucose-fructose, fructose, corn syrup, liquid invert sugar, cane sugar, dextrose, and the list goes on. As you can see by these examples, the sugar in some foods is not always called "sugar." Sugar is also naturally present in some foods such as fruit.

If you pick up any processed or manufactured food and read the list of ingredients, you might see sugar or any of the other names listed above as part of the product. However, sugar is sugar, no matter what form it comes in.

Is too much sugar "bad" for you?

Everyone eats some sugar, in one form or another, because it is present in so many foods. Eating small amounts of sugar as part of some everyday foods (like bread, for example) isn't going to create any problems for most people.

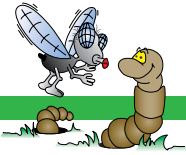
However, problems may if you eat a lot of foods that have a lot of "hidden" sugar, but that are low on nutrition. These foods, which include candy bars, cookies, donuts, soda pop or sugary snack foods, for example, contain "empty calories." In other words, these types of foods provide energy, without really providing any real nutrition in the form of vitamins, minerals, or protein. Most high-sugar foods are "empty" of nutrition. Many people eat too many sweets and high-sugar foods INSTEAD of more nutritious foods.

What can happen if I eat too much sugar?

Too much sugar can lead to tooth decay. The more high-sugar foods and added sugar you eat, the greater your chances of having rotten teeth (which means cavities).

Sugar has been linked to obesity. Obesity, or overfatness, is a serious problem for many people. It can have several negative effects on your health – for example, heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. And while there are a number of causes of obesity, one of the main ones is eating more calories than your body needs. If you take in more energy than your body can use, it will take the extra energy and store it by converting it to body fat. High-sugar snacks are generally also high in fat. Foods that are high in fat can also contribute to extra "empty" calories.

Foods that are high in sugar don't usually take up too much room in your stomach. This means that if you're hungry, you've got to eat more high-sugar foods in order to feel full. You'll end up eating all those extra "empty" calories before you feel full. This is because a lot of sugar can get packed into a rather small amount of food.



A Guide for making healthier choices

Besides the connections between sugar and obesity, eating too much sugar has also been linked to diabetes and **heart disease**.

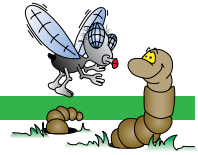
So, does that mean no more soda pop or candy bars? Well, no, not exactly! These kinds of foods can still be part of your commitment to eat healthier. Remember the basic principles of balance and moderation. These high-sugar foods can be eaten once in a while and in balance with other, more nutritious foods.

How can I reduce my sugar intake?

- 1) Cut down gradually. Some people may find it very hard to break the habit of eating a lot of high-sugar foods and/or added sugar. If they cut out sweets and added sugar from their daily eating, they may begin to "crave" these foods, which may increase their desire to eat sweets and sugar even more. (Some researchers even feel that sugar is addictive). To avoid these cravings, it is best to try and gradually eat fewer sweets and less added sugar over time.
- 2) Beware of empty calories. Replace high-sugar foods with healthier choices. Have fruit or vegetable snacks more often. All those empty calories make it harder for you to get enough healthy food and to get the nutrients your body needs each day. Sweets should be eaten occasionally in moderation and in balance with healthier choices.
- 3) Make sure you have a protein food at each meal or snack. Foods that are higher in protein can help make you feel satisfied and reduce your "need" to eat more sugar.
- 4) Don't have dessert after every meal and have sweet desserts only a couple of times a week. As a suggestion, get into the habit of replacing sweet desserts with fresh fruit instead.
- 5) Instead of buying cakes, cookies, pies, pastries or other high-sugar snacks and desserts from the grocery store, have homemade ones more often. Experiment with cutting back on the amount of sugar used in these recipes. You may be able to cut the amount of sugar in some recipes by as much as 30-50%.
- 6) Find an alternative to soda pop and other sweetened soft drinks. If you're thirsty, drink plain water. Instead, try mineral water, unsweetened fruit juice, or water.
- 7) WATCH OUT FOR "SUGAR CUES" Pay attention to whether you crave something sweet after seeing a commercial on TV for cookies or candy/chocolate bars or some other high-sugar food.
- 8) Don't "reward" yourself for a hard, tough or stressful day by eating a bunch of sweets or high-sugar foods. Don't eat a bag of cookies or 3 candy bars just because you had a hard day and feel like you "deserve" them. There are healthier ways to deal with the stress in your life. For example, exercise to relieve tension and help yourself feel better, have a hot bath, talk with friends, go for a walk, listen to relaxing music or sit quietly and breathe deeply.
- 9) Choose low-sugar breakfast cereals more often. Many breakfast cereals contain a lot of sugar, often in the form of a sweetened coating of some kind.
- 10) Learn how to read the nutrition labels on boxes and packages. This will help you to identify foods that contain a lot of added sugar. Look at the list of ingredients on packaged foods. The first ingredient in the list is what is in the food in the greatest amount. So, with this in mind, you need to watch for foods that list sugar as one of the top 3 ingredients. Remember that sugar can be known by several other names: for example, glucose, sucrose, glucose-fructose, liquid invert sugar, honey, icing sugar, corn syrup, dextrose, cane sugar, and so on.

Choose Health - Eat Less Sugar.

A Guide for making healthier choices



Lunchbox # 1

ATHLETES AND SUGAR

Many athletes rely on sugary drinks and foods to help get them through an event or game. An athlete's performance can be influenced by many factors including what, and how much, they eat and drink. An athlete's ability to perform well in an athletic event or sport depends more on what they've eaten in the 24 hours before the event than what they eat right before, or during an event.

During many athletic activities, your muscles rely mainly on a fuel called glycogen. The body can store a certain amount of glycogen, both in the liver and in muscles. The amount that is stored depends more on what kinds of food you eat for 1-2 days before your game or competition, rather than what you eat immediately before. As well, what you eat to "recover" in the first 30-45 minutes after the activity can influence the glycogen stored in the muscles. If you are an athlete, you will likely perform better if your diet is high in carbohydrates like grains, breads, cereals, fruits and vegetables each day. In this way, you can help to ensure your muscles will have a good supply of glycogen. To help your body store glycogen more effectively, it is very important to drink lots of water as well.

If you compete in long-duration athletic events that are 60-90 minutes or longer (for example, long-distance running, cycling or triathlon events), sugar can help to maintain their energy levels during a very long event or training session.

Lunchbox # 2

SUGAR MYTH: EATING TOO MUCH SUGAR CAN LEAD TO PROBLEMS WITH MOOD, POOR ATTENTION, EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY OR HYPERACTIVITY - Excess sugar could play a role in these problems. The difficult thing to do is to prove it - it's too hard to tell whether eating excess sugar can actually "cause" these problems or not. There is more research needed in these areas in order to better understand how, or even if, sugar could play a role. Sometimes, parents, teachers, and young people who do have problems with poor attention or being hyperactive will notice that the problems worsen when too much sugar is eaten on a frequent basis.

Lunchbox # 3

Choosing a Healthy Breakfast Cereal

Breakfast cereals are made from grains – wheat, rice, oats and corn are some common examples. Choose cereals that are as close to the natural grain as possible. Choose cereals that have been refined as little as possible. Whole grain cereals are higher in fibre, protein and naturally low-in-fat and sugar, as a general rule.

Look for these words on the box:

- 1) **Low-in-fat** – Cereals are low-in-fat because the grains they are made from are naturally low-in-fat.
- 2) **Low-in-sugar / No added sugar** – Many cereals are sweetened with extra sugar, sometimes in the form of a sugary coating or some other add-on ingredient (for example, marshmallows).
- 3) **Source of fibre** – Fibre is important to your health because it helps keep you regular – yes, that means what you think. Fibre takes up a lot of bulk in your intestines. When your diet contains enough fibre, the food you eat doesn't stay in your system for too long before it passes through. When your diet is low in fibre, food stays in your system for much longer.