

Tip of the Month

Breaking the sugar addiction

Sugar used to be considered a 'treat' but now it is so pervasive in our food that we do not always realize that we are eating it. Recently sugar has been identified as a major contributor to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and [fatty liver disease](#) and experts are sounding the alarm. Although no one is recommending a completely sugar-less diet (since there are naturally occurring sugars in fruits and vegetables), experts agree that cutting back on unnecessary added sugars would be a good idea for everyone.

Easier said than done.

Sugar comes in both simple and complex forms. A simple sugar is usually made up of only one or two sugar molecules and is digested by the body very quickly (leading to spikes in blood sugar). Pop and candy, for example, contain simple sugars. Complex sugars are made up several different molecules and these sugars form starches and other complex carbohydrates. Fruits and vegetables contain complex sugars.

Simple sugars go by many different names including fructose, sucrose, dextrose, glucose and maltose, not to mention corn syrup, a combo of fructose and glucose. They can often be found in places that you would least expect it -- hot dog buns, pasta sauces, fat-free dressings, barbecue sauce and some flavoured yogurts to name a few. So how do you sleuth out and cut down on the right kinds of sugar as well as the amounts that you consume everyday? The following are a few tips that will help:

Make water one of your drinks of choice.

Pop, juice and sports drinks are some of the largest contributors to daily sugar consumption. Consider that one 8 oz glass of juice represents more than one piece of fruit in terms of the sugar content. Milk is a natural source of sugars but it is also an important source of protein, vitamin D and calcium.

Read labels and choose low sugar or no-sugar added products whenever possible.

Condiments like ketchup and many breakfast cereals contain significant amounts of simple sugar per serving. Compare products before you buy and choose the one with the lowest sugar content and the highest nutritional value.

Prepare your own food from scratch.

Cooking or baking at home allows you to control the amount of sugar you add and to substitute healthier alternatives (i.e. unsweetened apple sauce, honey) when sweetening is desired.

Try sugar substitutes.

Try using flavourful spices like cinnamon, cardamom or cloves to replace the sugar content. Adding fresh fruits to your unflavored yogurts or your breakfast cereals will liven up the taste of these foods, without all that extra sugar. You will be increasing your intake of fibre and many vitamins as well. The addition of chopped vegetables can also add a tangy flavor to foods like casseroles, stir fries and soups.

Introduce more protein into your diet.

Avoid the cravings that come when your blood sugar drops by eating more high-protein foods -- fish, eggs, poultry, nuts and seeds -- that take longer to digest and will maintain your energy levels.

The key is to reduce the sources of 'added sugar' in your diet wherever possible and the more you learn about what's in your food, the better choices you'll be able to make. Reducing your sugar consumption isn't easy but if you cut back over time, your body will eventually lose the craving...and your liver (and the rest of your body) will thank you for it!

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