

EASY WAYS TO REDUCE SUGAR INTAKE

On average, Australians are consuming about 30 teaspoons of added sugar a day, yet the World Health Organisation recommends adults consume only about 6 teaspoons of added sugar a day (note this does not include natural sugars like those in fruit). Excessive sugar in the diet is not the best idea when it comes to healthy living. Although sugar-free and quitting sugar-type diets appear to be popping up everywhere, a healthy balanced approach is always a better option. Sugar seems to be in everything these days, even many foods that are often perceived to be healthy choices, so it can be difficult wading through confusing nutrition labels and packaging claims. With a bit of information under your belt, you'll hopefully find it easier to reduce the added sugar in your diet.



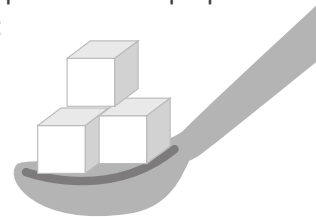
THE SCIENCE BEHIND SUGAR

Sugar is a carbohydrate and a source of energy (kilojoules) for our bodies. In all its forms, sugar is converted to glucose within the body, which apart from being one of the body's main energy sources, it is the primary source of fuel for the brain. It is broken down from carbohydrate-rich foods such as grains, fruits, milk products, small amounts from vegetables as well as from processed foods. If the body does not need glucose for energy, it stores glucose in the liver and the muscles in a form called glycogen. If glycogen stores are full, glucose is stored as fat. Too much sugar can lead to health problems, so it's important to be aware of the sugar content of everything you eat. By doing this, you can make sure you're not eating more than you should for good health.

THE HIDDEN SUGARS

Processed sugar is refined from sugarcane or other plants and is then added to food and drinks when processed or prepared. On a food or drink label, sugar has many different names depending on where it comes from, including:

- sucrose
- fructose
- glucose
- dextrose
- maltose
- maltodextrin
- sorghum syrup
- corn syrup
- malt extract
- invert sugar
- cane or raw sugar
- agave syrup
- fruit juice concentrate
- evaporated cane juice
- molasses



Apart from what we add to food and beverages like tea, coffee, cereal and the sugar we use in cooking, the majority of the sugar we eat comes from processed and pre-packaged foods and drinks. Aside from the obvious foods like cake, lollies and biscuits, here's where you'll find some of the more sneaky hidden sugars:

- fruit juices
- fruit smoothies
- muesli & breakfast bars
- cereals & granola
- instant oats (flavoured)
- jams & spreads
- bottled sauces
- bottled salad dressing
- canned baked beans
- canned soups
- low-fat or diet foods
- flavoured or low-fat yogurt
- supermarket bread
- sports drinks
- soft drink
- iced tea
- iced coffee
- frozen meals
- bakery foods
- 'healthy' desserts



HOW MUCH SUGAR IS IN THAT?

250ml glass apple juice	6 teaspoons
375ml can soft drink	10 teaspoons
375ml sports drink	7 teaspoons
200g tub fruit yogurt	3.5 teaspoons
50g chocolate bar	7 teaspoons
fruit-based muesli bar	5 teaspoons
2 tablespoons tomato sauce	2 teaspoons

TIPS TO REDUCE ADDED SUGAR

Most people know that too much sugar is not good for them, but for some reason, they think the risk of excess sugar consumption is less than that of having too much saturated and trans fat, sodium or overall kilojoules. Here are some tips to help you cut back on the added sugars in your diet:

READ THE LABELS

Get into the habit of checking the nutrition label on packaged foods for ingredients (use the list of names for sugar on the previous page) and sugar content. If you're not familiar with nutrition panels, go straight to the 'per 100g' column - keeping in mind that around 4g of sugar equals one teaspoon - and calculate how many teaspoons there are in a 100g serve. Less than 5g of sugar per 100g is a good, low-sugar product.

USE YOUR LABEL READING SKILLS TO FIND LOWER SUGAR OPTIONS OF YOUR FAVOURITE FOODS

Swap your cereals and muesli bars to lower sugar options and stock up on healthy versions; buy whole grains such as oats, flaked quinoa, millet, amaranth and buckwheat which can all be used to make porridge and muesli. Make your own nut and muesli bars, whip up some peanut butter protein balls, swap milk or white chocolate for dark chocolate (at least 70%) and make wholemeal or almond meal cakes and muffins sweetened with fruit or a touch of honey. Steer clear of fluffy supermarket bread too; go for whole grain, rye or sourdough bread.

TRY ALTERNATIVE SWEETENERS

If you are going to eat sugar, try using some healthier alternatives, such as Stevia, Natvia, honey, maple syrup, rice malt syrup, coconut sugar and Medjool dates. Although these are natural products, they are still forms of sugar so always use moderation.

HAVE THE WHOLE FRUIT INSTEAD OF JUICE

Fruit juice, whether pre-bottled or freshly squeezed, is a sugar bomb. The fibre (and most of the nutrients) has been stripped from the fruit in the juicing process, basically leaving you with fruit-flavoured sugar water! Often you'll be having the equivalent of 4 oranges per cup of orange juice - you wouldn't eat that many in one sitting surely! Instead, eat a whole piece of fruit with a glass of water, or if you're not ready to quit your juice habit just yet, make your own at home using a blender and drink the pulpy bits too. Dried fruit is also a better alternative to juice and it has all the good stuff, just without the water content. Again be careful not to overeat as because of the lack of water it has more sugar per gram.

CHOOSE WATER

It's no secret that there is also a lot of sugar in soft drink, sports drinks, flavoured milk drinks and cordials. Plain water or soda water is a much healthier option - jazz it up with things like slices of lemon and orange, berries and fresh mint leaves. Your body will thank you for the hydration without the sugar rush!

DITCH THE 'DIET', 'LIGHT' AND LOW-FAT FOODS

These packaged foods are usually laden with hidden sugars, to make up for the lack of flavour due to the removal of fat. You're better off getting the full, whole version! Go for full-fat plain, natural or Greek yogurt instead of fruity or flavoured or low-fat varieties. Your tastebuds will adjust - if you find it too tart at first, add fresh fruit, cinnamon or a dash of honey to sweeten.

CUT BACK ON SWEET SPREADS AND SAUCES

Try something different on your toast instead of the usual sweet spreads like jam, marmalade and honey. Nut butters make delicious substitutes, and if you're still needing some sweetness in the morning try sliced banana with peanut butter or tahini, or cottage cheese with cinnamon and sliced peaches on your toast. Avocado with a squeeze of lemon or sliced cheese and tomato are all great sugar-free options as well. Avoid bottled sauces and dressings with added sugar; those teaspoons quickly add up. Make your own sugar-free dressings and sauces with fresh ingredients instead; a quick Google search will bring up a plethora of easy recipes.

Worldwide we are consuming about 2000 extra kilojoules a day from sugar. That's just about what you would need to consume if you wanted to gain half a kilo a week. By sticking to the healthier versions and saving the indulgent, high-sugar treats for weekends and special occasions, you'll feel much better - it's all about balance!