

Bottom Line – Added sugar is not so sweet

Next time you go to grab a sweet treat, just remember that because sugars are simple carbohydrates, they digest more quickly. Take a quick look at the ingredients list; syrup, molasses, and most ingredients ending with -ose mean added sugar. Swap out your favourite candy bar or baked treat for wholesome foods packed with **starches** and **fibre** such as fruits and vegetables, which digest more slowly, making us feel fuller, longer. And let's not forget to trade those sugary beverages such as sodas for water, infused water or unsweetened milk. When it comes to preparing meals at home, instead of adding sugar, just try to spice things up with a bit of ginger or cinnamon for a flavourful treat.

Urgent action is needed to reduce the estimated 80% of deaths from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in Jamaica.¹⁴ Nutrition Facts panels can be hard to understand and as consumers, we need an easier way to identify added sugars and to make healthier food choices when shopping. Let's support the call for "High In" front-of-package warning labels (FOPWL) to help us to know #WhatsInOurFood.



Remember, there's nothing sweeter than a healthy lifestyle!

¹ Gordon, B. 2019. *The Scoop on Added Sugars*. Retrieved from <https://www.eatright.org/food/nutrition/nutrition-facts-and-food-labels/the-scoop-on-added-sugars>

² Pierre, B., Scott-Dixon, K. 2021. *The Surprising Truth about Sugar*. Retrieved from <https://www.precisionnutrition.com/truth-about-sugar>

³ EUFIC. 2013. *Glucose and The Brain: Improving Mental Performance*. Retrieved from <https://www.eufic.org/en/whats-in-food/article/glucose-and-mental-performance>

⁴ Ottawa Heart Institute. 2015. *What You Should Know about Sugar*. Retrieved from <https://www.ottawaheart.ca/the-beat/2015/12/08/what-you-should-know-about-sugar>

⁵ Harvard Health Publishing. 2019. *The sweet danger of sugar*. Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/the-sweet-danger-of-sugar>

⁶ U.S. Food & Drug Administration. 2020. *Added Sugars on the New Nutrition Facts Label*. Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/food/new-nutrition-facts-label/added-sugars-new-nutrition-facts-label>

⁷ Dietitians of Canada. 2019. *What You Need to Know About Sugar*. Retrieved from <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Carbohydrate-and-Sugar/What-you-need-to-know-about-sugar.aspx#:~:text=Sugar%20is%20a%20type%20of,sugar%20in%20fruit%20and%20milk>

⁸ Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2017. *Facts on Health Risks of Sugar Drinks*. Retrieved from <https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachmen>

⁹ Diabetes UK. 2019. *The Liver and Diabetes*. Retrieved from <https://www.diabetes.co.uk/body/liver-and-diabetes.html>

¹⁰ Howard, B., Wylie-Rosett, J. 2002. *Sugar and Cardiovascular Disease: A Statement for Healthcare Professionals from the Committee on Nutrition of the Council on Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Metabolism of the American Heart Association*. Retrieved from <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/full/10.1161/01.CIR.0000019552.77778.04>

¹¹ World Health Organization. 2021. *Reducing free sugars intake in children and adults*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/elena/titles/guidance_summaries/sugars_intake/en/

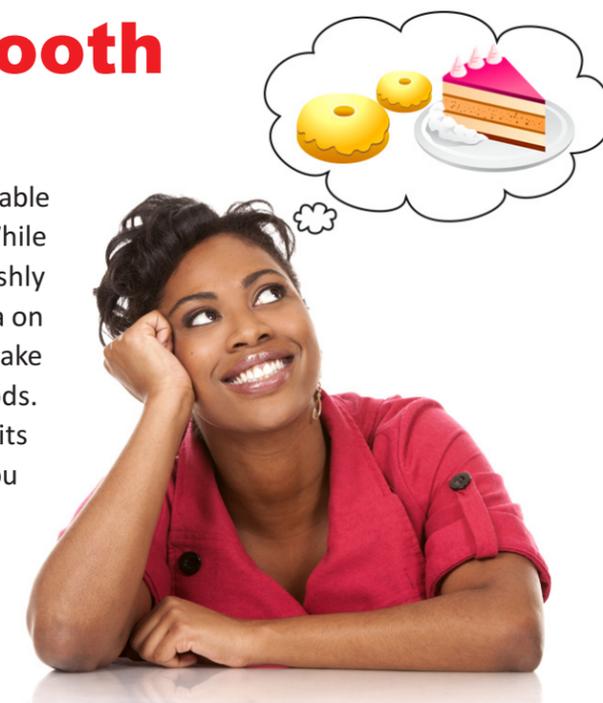
¹² National Health Services UK. 2020. *Sugar: the facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/>

¹³ British Heart Foundation. 2021. *Heart Matters: What Are Free Sugars?* Retrieved from <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/sugar-salt-and-fat/free-sugars>



For Every Sweet Tooth

Almost everyone loves a good treat, especially delectable delights with **sugar**, spice and everything nice. While we may love to sink our teeth into a warm, freshly baked cinnamon bun or pop the cap off of an icy cold soda on a hot summery day, it is quite important that we try to make smart choices when it comes to sugar and sweet foods. Although sugar is often regarded as a culprit due to its negative impacts on the body and health, there are ways you can be practical about healthy eating and things you should know to make smart, sweet choices.



Getting Granular: The Basics of Sugar

Sugar, an ingredient that has been used as part of our natural diet for ages, is a type of carbohydrate, specifically, a simple carbohydrate. As a simple carbohydrate, sugar is a quick and easy source of energy for your body¹. The most important form of energy that is provided is called **glucose**, and is either used by the body right away, or it is stored for use later.

Although sugar hasn't been in the good spotlight lately, there is still some good to its sweetness. Sugar plays a number of roles in our bodies as part of a balanced diet and in even in our environment. How? Plants convert sunlight into sugar, while our bodies convert sugar into energy. Sugar helps to make up our DNA, power our cells and the body stores it for use². The brain is one of the body's most highly active organs that relies on glucose for fuel. Our brain requires around 130 grams of glucose per day to keep functioning.³

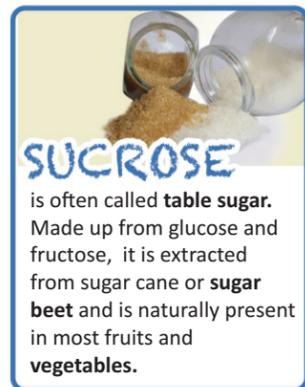
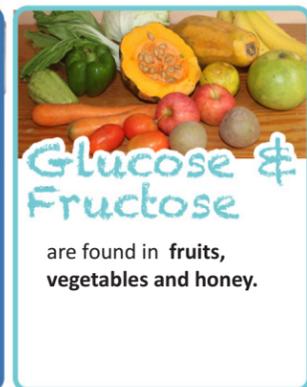
Types and Sources of Sugar

Oftentimes we picture sugar as just the traditional golden brown or white granules that we use to sweeten our teas and juices. However, "sugar" is actually a group of molecules that share a similar structure. So, we might actually call them "**sugars**", plural. There are two categories of sugars-**naturally occurring** or **added** to enhance the flavour or texture of foods and drinks.¹

Naturally occurring sugars are those that are a natural part of the foods we eat, such as in fruit, dairy and grains. Naturally occurring sugars in whole foods come with additional nutritional benefits such as fibre, vitamins, fats,

and other types of carbohydrates.⁴ These foods are healthy because these additional nutritional benefits they have help to make you feel full, thereby limiting the amount you eat. For example:

- ▶ Dairy products contain a natural form of sugar called lactose, but they also provide protein, calcium and vitamin D.
- ▶ Fruits and vegetables may contain a variety of natural sugars, but they also provide dietary fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.
- ▶ Grains provide some naturally occurring sugars, as well as vitamins and minerals. And many whole grains are good sources of dietary fibre and may provide additional nutrients, too.¹

			
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It is easy for us to over indulge on **added sugars** as they are usually found in high amounts in most commercially prepared processed and ultra-processed foods such as flavoured yogurts, cereals, bread, cookies, cakes, energy drinks, soft drinks, flavoured milk and fruit drinks. Often times we also assume that beverages such as fruit drinks, energy drinks and flavoured waters have much the same health benefits as drinking still, sparkling or ordinary tap water. But for a fact, even these are packed with added sugars. Because of this, we end up eating way more sugar than our bodies require. In the USA, adult men take in an average of 24 teaspoons of added sugar per day, according to the National Cancer Institute. That's equal to 384 calories out of the *average* daily need of 2000 calories.⁵

The graphic (right) shows other names for added sugar. Look for them in the ingredients list on the package. If these names are listed in the first three ingredients on a food package, the food is likely high in added sugar. Labels for foods and beverages with added sugars will list the number of grams and the percent Daily Value (%DV) for added sugars within the Nutrition Facts panel. Having the word "includes" before added sugars on the label indicates that added sugars are included in the number of grams of total sugars

LOOKING FOR SUGAR?
It goes by many names.

- BROWN RICE SYRUP CORN SYRUP
- HONEY FRUIT NECTAR
- MAPLE SYRUP MALT SYRUP
- AGAVE NECTAR MOLASSES
- EVAPORATED CANE JUICE CORN SYRUP SOLIDS
- GLUCOSE SUGAR
- SUCROSE
- FRUCTOSE FRUIT JUICE CONCENTRATE
- GALACTOSE GLUCOSE-FRUCTOSE SYRUP
- CRYSTALLINE FRUCTOSE MALTOSE
- DEXTRROSE HIGH-FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP

in the product.⁶ The rule of thumb to remember when reading food labels for added sugars is that 5% or less is low and 20% or more is high. Naturally occurring sugars are not listed on the ingredient list of food and beverage products.⁷

Fact Check: No Sugar Coating

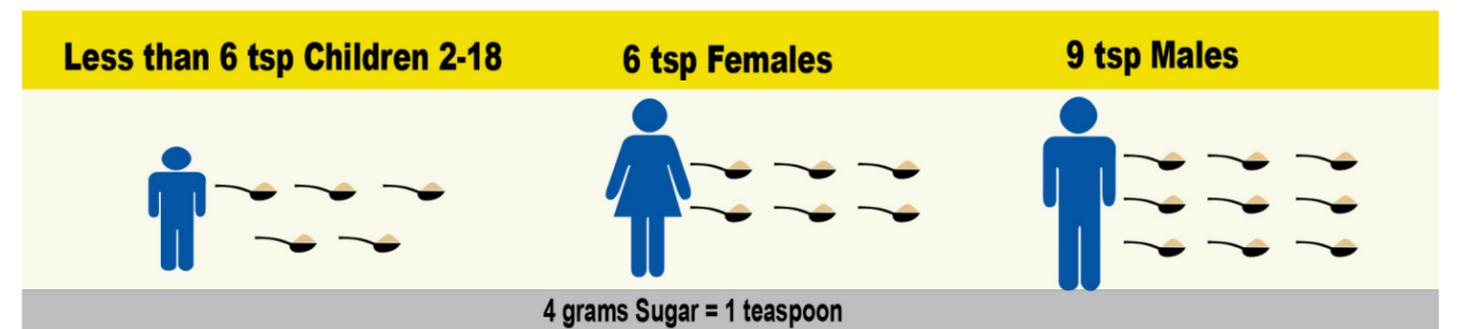
- ▶ Just 1 sugary drink a day increases the chances of being overweight by 52% for children and 27% for adults.⁸
- ▶ A typical 600mL soda can contain as much as 15-20 teaspoons of sugar. Box drinks may contain 12-15 teaspoons and tetra pack juice boxes for kids may have as much as 5-6 teaspoons of sugar.

The Sweet Danger of Sugar

Are you aware that too much sugar, especially added sugars, can increase your risk of diabetes and cause damage to organs such as the liver?⁹ Excessive sugar intake, especially in liquid form, is harmful to the body. This may also cause increased acne, dental cavities, fatigue and risk of heart disease and high blood pressure. Not only this, but it can increase your risk of overweight and obesity because when the liver is unable to process and release all of the sugars consumed, that excess is stored as fat in the body.¹⁰

How Much Sugar Should I Eat?

Free sugars are all sugars added to foods or drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, as well as sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates. These are free because they're not inside the cells of the food we eat. The World Health Organization recommends that adults and children reduce their daily intake of free sugars to less than 10% of their total energy intake.¹¹ Adults should aim to have **no more than 30g of free sugars** a day, (roughly equivalent to 7 sugar cubes or 7 teaspoons). Children aged 7 to 10 should have no more than 24g of free sugars a day (6 sugar cubes or 6 teaspoons).^{12,13} The WHO also advises that a further reduction to below 5% or roughly 25 grams (6 teaspoons) per day would provide additional health benefits. Guidelines from the American Heart Association state that the recommended daily allowance for added sugars in adults and children are as follows:



QUICK TIP
If a sweetener is listed in the first three ingredients, the drink is loaded with sugar!