

October 1, 2010

THE SKINNY ON SUGAR

HAVE YOU HAD YOUR 22 TEASPOONS OF SUGAR TODAY?

By Kate Scarlata, RD, LDN



No, we're not talking about indulging on Halloween. Most Americans consume that much *each* and *every* day. From breads to cereals to packaged tomato sauce and bakery goods, our reliance on convenience foods loaded with added sugar has skyrocketed.

BUT WHAT'S REALLY WRONG WITH SUGAR?

For starters, researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health have found that those who drink one or more sugar-sweetened beverages per day were more likely to gain more weight and were at greater risk for developing diabetes. National health surveys have linked excess fructose such as HFCS in soda to increased risk of elevated blood pressure. In addition, too much sugar:

- raises the fat in our blood,
- contributes to fatty livers,
- increases the risk of gout (a chronic form of painful arthritis),
- causes dental caries, • raises the risk of pancreatic cancer,
- decreases diet quality and
- may increase heart disease risk.



SO, HOW MUCH SUGAR SHOULD I HAVE EACH DAY?

The American Heart Association recommends that most women limit their sugar intake to 100 calories (about six teaspoons) and men limit to 150 calories (about nine teaspoons) per day.

Wondering how much sugar your child should consume? Check out mypyramid.gov and put in your child's height, weight, age and activity level to get an appropriate range of extra sugar calories that would be appropriate.

HOW MANY TEASPOONS OF SUGAR ARE IN MY FOOD ITEM?

In general, to determine how many teaspoons of sugar are in a food item, divide the grams of sugar listed on the food label by four (Therefore, if a granola bar has 12 grams of sugar, it contains 3 teaspoons of sugar).

Consider experimenting with your child to figure out how much sugar is in the foods he or she eats. Do the math (divide the grams of sugar by 4) and then get a visual by measuring out the teaspoons of table sugar each item contains. This should make an impact on your child.

CURBING YOUR TASTE FOR SWEETS

No need to go "cold turkey" here! Slowly decrease the amount of sugar in your diet and your taste buds will likely adjust without a hitch.

TIPS TO DECREASE SUGAR:

- Instead of fruit juice or soda, try seltzer with a splash of 100% juice.
- Cut the sugar amount in your favorite recipe in half.
- Choose whole low sugar fruits such as fresh strawberries, blueberries and watermelon instead of dried fruits and fruit juice or bananas that sneak in more sugar in smaller amounts.
- Try plain or vanilla yogurt vs. the fruit flavored, which have added sugar and add your own berries or fruit.
- Sweeten pancakes with just a shake of confectionary sugar rather than globs of maple syrup.
- Choose breakfast cereals with 6 grams or less of sugar.
- Keep fruit juice portions to 4 ounces.

- Use mini chocolate chips in your favorite recipes.
- Order coffee without added sugar or cut usual amount in half.

BEST ADVICE

When it comes to sugar, less is more. Always keep in mind; it's the overall nutrition of the product we consume, not just the sugar content that matters. A glass of juice may have a similar amount of sugar as soda, but we all know the juice gives a bigger nutritional bang for the buck. Just like a breakfast cereal that is low in sugar but has no fiber may not be the better choice. Enjoy sweets provided by nature such as fresh berries or a delicious sweet n' sour green apple. And indulge in sweet treats less often; you'll enjoy them more!

Kate Scarlata, RD, LDN is a Boston-based private practice dietitian and mom of three children. Her latest book, -The Complete Idiot's Guide to Eating Well with IBS, Alpha 2010, details the most up-to-date science on Irritable Bowel Syndrome and dietary symptom management with over 160 delicious IBS friendly recipes. Follow Kate on twitter @beegood or katescarlata.com.

SUGAR CONTENT OF SELECTED FOODS AND BEVERAGES

FOOD & BEVERAGE	SERVING SIZE	SUGAR GRAMS	tsp. OF SUGAR
COLA	12 OUNCE	39	9 - 3/4
ORANGE JUICE	12 OUNCE	33	8 - 1/4
BANANA	LARGE	30	7 - 1/2
STRAWBERRIES	1 1/4 CUP	15	3 - 3/4
PEANUTS	1/4 CUP	0	0
CHICKEN	3 OUNCES	0	0
KELLOGG'S CORN POPS CEREAL	1 3/4 CUP	13	3 - 1/4
PEPPERIDGE FARM BRUSSELS COOKIE	1	3.6	ABOUT 1
HONEY ROASTED HONEY BUNCHES	3/4 CUP	6	1 - 1/2
OF OATS CEREAL			
CHEERIOS (PLAIN)	1 CUP	1 <1	
MARSHMALLOWS	4	20	5
HONEY GRAHAMS	2 FULL SHEETS	8	2
OREOS	3	14	3 - 1/2
DUNKIN DONUTS BLUEBERRY MUFFIN	1	46	11 - 1/2