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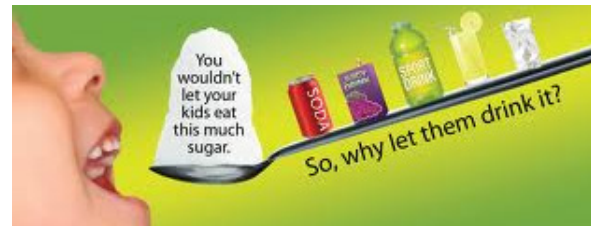
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Sugars and Sweeteners

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Did you know the average person devours over 100 pounds of sugar per year? Americans currently eat too many calories from added sugars with a large amount coming from sugar-sweetened drinks. This increase of added sugar matches the increase in overweight and obesity in the country.



Sugars can be naturally present in foods, such as fructose in fruit or lactose in milk. Sugars may also be added to food. Added sugars are also known as sweeteners that add calories to food or beverages. They are added to foods at the table or during processing or preparation. They provide little or no nutrients.

Sugar comes in many forms. To find out how much sugar is in a package of food, first check the "Nutrition Facts" panel on the package. Look for the word "Sugars" to see how much sugar is in the item per serving. To find the hidden forms of sugar, check the "Ingredients." When a sugar is close to first on the ingredients list, the food is high in added sugars.

Some common names for sugar include: brown sugar, cane juice, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, High-fructose corn syrup, honey, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, powdered sugar, raw sugar, sucrose and syrup.

What you drink is as important as what you eat. Sugar sweetened drinks provide large amounts of sugar to our diets. Fruit-ades such as lemonade, fruit punch, powdered fruit drinks, and fruit drinks containing less than 100% fruit juice, sports drinks, sodas, flavored waters, energy drinks, and sweetened teas are examples of sugar sweetened beverages.

One of the healthiest ways to reduce caloric intake is to lower your consumption of added sugars. In particular, reduce sugar sweetened drinks. Sugar-sweetened drinks can increase weight gain. They may also increase the risk of diabetes and tooth decay.

Children start drinking sugar sweetened drinks at a very young age. Sugar sweetened drinks are a problem not only for what they contain, but for what they push out of the diet. For example, children who drink sugar sweetened drinks often do not drink enough nutrient rich milk. Nutrient needs should be met through eating foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. It is best to stay away from processed and packaged foods. Limit added sugar as much as possible.

Alternative sweeteners are calorie free. These provide a sweet taste without calories. They provide minimal to zero calories. They are low in calories; however, they are several times

sweeter than sugar. All alternative sweeteners on the market are considered safe. Some people may have reactions to sweeteners like headaches, allergies, etc. Recent studies are looking at the potential of artificial sweeteners increasing our cravings for sweets. Use of drinks with sweeteners may replace more nutritious foods, especially in the diets of children. Therefore, they should be consumed in moderation.

Let's Talk: Use food labels to help you make better choices

Families should consider how many sugar sweetened drinks they are drinking. Teach children how to read the Nutrition Facts Label. At the grocery store, make a game of reading labels to identify hidden sugar. Buy fewer foods high in sugar such as cookies, candies, sugar sweetened drinks, and prepared baked goods. Stock your refrigerator with healthy foods and beverages that family members enjoy. Teach children to make healthy choices early on so they will carry those habits with them throughout their lives. When eating out, let children know before ordering that you will not buy sugary drinks. Be a good role model by not ordering any for yourself either.

Activities:

It is good to be physically active. Get the whole family involved — enjoy an afternoon bike ride with your kids, go for a walk or hike. Most important — have fun while being active! Realize that being active makes you thirsty. Choose water instead of sugary drinks to stay hydrated. To stay hydrated it is important to drink extra water before, during, and after exercise. Sports drinks are for hard physical activities lasting 1 hour or longer. Regular soda, energy or sports drinks, and other sweet drinks usually contain a lot of added sugar. They provide more calories than needed and often do not quench your thirst. Choose water, it is convenient and cheap. Use a clean, reusable water bottle and fill it up with water.

Recipe for Health:

Mint Tea

You can always make water more exciting by adding slices of lemon, lime, orange, watermelon, or cucumber, which adds flavor with few calories or added sugar. Or try this, bring a pot of water to a boil and add fresh mint. Boil one minute and remove from stove. Serve over ice.

Recipe and photo retrieved from: <http://foodandhealth.com/>

