



Bitter Truth about Sugar

Sugar can be lumped (pun intended) into two categories – intrinsic and free sugars. Intrinsic sugars are those that occur naturally in dairy, fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods. This category includes sugars such as lactose, fructose, and sucrose. The free sugar category is all the other sugar that is added to food to make it more palatable or visually enticing (ex. corn syrup). There is no nutritional value in free sugar.

One concern with the amount of free sugars in the Canadian diet is that it initiates a snowball effect that has negative health consequences: A meal with free sugars has low nutritional value meaning that you will not feel satiated leading to larger portion sizes and therefore a consumption of even more sugars.

A high-sugar diet has been linked to a variety of health concerns including diabetes, dental issues such as cavities, heart and stroke concerns, obesity, and even some forms of cancer.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued guidelines with respect to how much added sugar is acceptable. Many of these recommendations were adopted by the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation that recently (Aug. 2014) issued a position statement about sugar intake for adults and children.

The WHO report suggests that an ideal target would be to reduce consumption of free sugars to 5% of total daily caloric intake but recognize that a goal of 10% is likely more reasonable for most people.

Based on a 2,000 calorie per day diet, keeping sugar intake to 10% or 200 calories (or 48 grams of sugar), may seem like a piece of cake. But considering that that piece of cake may run you 40 grams of sugar, there's not much left before you hit your maximum intake.

Statistics Canada does not have data dividing sugar consumption by intrinsic or added sugars but on a whole, in 2004, the average Canadian consumed 110 grams of sugar a day. That's equivalent to 26 teaspoons of sugar or 21.4% of caloric intake. It is estimated that more than 13% comes from added sugars.

Free sugars are "hidden" in many common foods: a tablespoon of ketchup contains 1 teaspoon of sugar; yogurt can contain up to 1-1/2 teaspoons. Of particular concern are sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs). These are sodas, energy drinks, and sports drinks that are the single largest contributor of sugar in the diet. A standard soda can is 355 mL and contains up to 40 grams (about 10 teaspoons) of sugar with no nutritional value.

Some steps have already been taken to curb consumption of added sugars including limiting what is available in school cafeterias but there is still a long way to go. Advocates for healthier lifestyles are looking for help from all levels of government to promote education, ensure access to healthy food that is economical, revise nutritional labels to take all sugar forms into account, and reduce marketing to children to name but a few topics.

Sources: www.heartandstroke.ca

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2014/consultation-sugar-guideline/en/>