

Creating Health & Nutrition Fact Sheets

for the StrongWomen™ Program

Most of us like sweet foods. The earliest sweet foods available to humans were either fruits or honey. Later, when humans discovered how to refine the sweet juice of sugar cane and then sugar beets, it became easier to make foods sweeter by just adding refined sugar.

The table sugar that you buy in the grocery store, sucrose, is made from sugar cane or sugar beets. It is composed of two simple sugar molecules, glucose and fructose, linked together. Glucose and fructose are sometimes used independently as ingredients.

Other sweeteners used as ingredients in foods include high-fructose corn syrup, lactose, and maltose. Fructose also occurs naturally in many fruits, while lactose is what gives milk its slightly sweet taste. Some vegetables have other “natural” sugars. Plus, we can use natural sweeteners like honey, sorghum, molasses, and maple syrup at home.



Sweeteners

Sweeteners in Manufactured Foods

Sugar (as sucrose) and many other sweeteners are added to many products in the American food supply. One sweetener, high-fructose corn syrup, is a common ingredient in manufactured foods, including cookies, candies, and soft drinks. As a result, Americans consume about 64 pounds of sugar and sweeteners per person per year, or more than 20 teaspoons of refined sugar per day. This equals 320 calories that most of us do not need in our diets.

For example, a can of regular Pepsi has the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of sugar and contains 150 calories. It is very easy to take in more sweetener than needed.

Role in Nutrition

Refined sugar and similar sweeteners are carbohydrates. Our bodies use carbohydrate foods as energy sources. We can measure that energy in calories. Sugar and the sweeteners mentioned all contain energy—4 calories' worth per gram and 16 calories per teaspoon—but no useful vitamins or minerals. Thus, we often call sweetener calories “empty calories.” This is why we need to be careful about choosing foods with “added sugars,” especially in foods that we choose for children.

Tip

To reduce calories from sweeteners, read the Nutrition Facts panel on food products. It will tell you how many grams of sugar the food contains. Then compare products. Which has less sugar?

MyPyramid and the 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend using sugar in moderation. Here, “sugar” refers to all the sweeteners mentioned. Since sugar contains calories, eating large amounts of sweets such as candy, cakes, and pies or drinking sugar-sweetened drinks can lead to weight gain and dental cavities.

Is using honey or other natural sweeteners a better choice than refined table sugar? The answer is no, if you're looking for fewer calories. See the following calorie comparison.

<i>Kind of Sweetener</i>	<i>Calories per Tablespoon</i>
Sugar	50
Honey	64
Molasses	53
Corn syrup	56
Sorghum	61
Maple syrup	52

Shopping Tips

One of the best ways to manage your sugar or sweetener intake is to read both the Nutrition Facts panel and the ingredients list on food packages.

- On the Nutrition Facts panel, sugar is listed under total carbohydrates. The sugar content listed here includes naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as those added to the food item.
- Check the ingredient list for the specific names of added sweeteners, such as sucrose, fructose, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, lactose, and maltose. You may also see other refined sugars, such as confectioners' sugar,

Examine Your Choices

Food	What I buy now	What I plan to try
<i>Example: Cereal</i>	Sugar frosted flakes	Plain wheat flakes
My goal:		

powdered sugar, dextrose, maple syrup, turbinado sugar, and mannitol (a sugar alcohol). Sometimes glucose is listed as dextrose. Note the location of the sugar in the list. The ingredient listed first is the most by weight in that particular food item. If various sweeteners are high on the list, you might want to choose another food.

- Examine your choices. You can cut down on calories by using fewer processed foods made with sweeteners. For example, buy break-

fast cereals having the least amount of sugars and add fresh fruit. Or purchase low-fat plain yogurt and add your own favorite fruit. If you're thirsty, drink water and add a slice of lemon, lime, or orange for flavor.

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Sources: www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2006/406_sweeteners.html, accessed August 1, 2007; Pennington, Jean A. T. Bowes & Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used. 17th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams, and Wilkins, 1998; www.co.mohave.az.us/WIC/sugar.htm, accessed August 1, 2007.

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