



Honey or sugar: Is one better?

I think honey is healthier than sugar, but a friend disagrees, saying it's just like liquid sugar. Who's right?

Honey and sugar have a lot in common, but there are some differences that do appear to give honey an edge. The question is, are those differences significant?

First, let's examine the similarities. Both honey and sugar are calorie-dense sweeteners. And, both are primarily made up of a combination of fructose and glucose, though their chemical structure differs. In sugar, the fructose and glucose are bound together. The combination is called sucrose. In honey, fructose and glucose are primarily independent of each other, although honey also contains a bit of sucrose.

Honey generally contains more fructose than glucose, and since fructose tastes sweeter than glucose, you might find yourself using less honey than you would sugar.

At the same time, honey is more dense, and so it weighs more than sugar. Because of this, a tablespoon of honey has 64 calories, compared with 45 calories for the same amount of table sugar. So, even if you use less honey, the calorie intake might be a wash.

Honey does supply some nutrients that its granulated counterpart does not, but the amounts are practically imperceptible. Honey also contains healthful antioxidants, with darker

types of honey generally containing even more of them.

That said, if you're looking at honey as a source of nutrients in your diet, you're in trouble. You should be getting vitamins, minerals and antioxidants from a healthy, well-rounded diet, including fruits, vegetables and whole grains, as well as low- or nonfat dairy, beans and lean meats. Despite its advantages, honey is an added sugar, just like granulated sugar, and should be counted as such.

Added sugars currently contribute about 16 percent of the total calories of the average American diet. But "added sugars" includes more than the sugar you put on your cereal or the honey you stir in your tea. It includes any sugars that are added during preparation or processing, such as the sugar in soft drinks, baked goods, fruit drinks, ice cream, candy, cereal, bread and many other foods.

Watch ingredients lists for clues that the food contains added sugars, including: corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, lactose, molasses, sucrose, sugar, agave nectar and syrup.

Sugars naturally found in fruit and milk do not need to be limited. They are part of a very healthful package.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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