



Watch sugar intake for calories, nutrients

I continue to be surprised at the amount of sugar my teenage daughter consumes. How bad is it for her?

If your daughter can afford the extra calories and otherwise eats a balanced diet, then you needn't be too concerned. The problem comes when sweets act as a substitute for more nutritious foods.

Nutritionists call soft drinks, candy and other sweets "empty calories" because they offer few side benefits. That is, they supply very few vitamins, minerals, proteins or phytochemicals along with the calories they provide.

The general recommendation from the World Health Organization is to keep sugar intake from added sugars and fruit juice to about 10 percent to 15 percent of total calories. Teenage girls usually need about 2,200 calories a day to maintain a healthy weight. That means your daughter probably can afford to consume between 220 and 330 calories a day in simple sugars and still be within the guideline. That equates to 55 to 82 grams of simple sugars, or about 11 to 16 teaspoons of sugar per day.

It's always helpful to have a good idea of what we're actually consuming, so you might encourage your daughter to keep

track of the sugars she consumes over the course of a few days. For processed foods, she can jot down the number of grams of "Sugars" listed under the "Carbohydrate" category on the Nutrition Facts label. She can look up other foods in an online database, such as the one at <http://www.nutritiondata.com>. If her tally adds up to more than 75 or 80 grams of sugar a day, it's likely she's not eating enough nutrient-dense calories for a healthful diet.

There's no evidence to suggest that sugar itself causes diabetes, heart disease, hyperactivity or other health problems (with the exception of cavities). And the concept of "sugar addiction" is a controversial one to say the least among professional dietitians. However, overloading on sugar can either increase your weight (because of the extra calories) or prevent you from getting the nutrients your body needs (because they fill you up without supplying those nutrients at the same time). It's smart to help your daughter begin making good decisions about her diet.

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@osu.edu](mailto:f Filipic.3@osu.edu).

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