



## Examine ingredients for added sugars

### Why are recent guidelines on reducing sugar intake focusing so much on 'added sugar'? Isn't all sugar the same?

At home, you might think of "added sugar" as the sugar in your coffee or sugary foods and snacks such as candy and baked goods. But in nutrition circles, "added sugars" also include any sugar, honey or syrups added in the processing or preparation of any food, including foods such as peanut butter, stuffing mix, salad dressing, flavored oatmeal and yogurt — foods few people think of as "sweets."

Naturally occurring sugars, on the other hand, are an intrinsic part of a food — of a whole fruit, vegetable, milk or grain product. Examples include lactose in milk or fructose in an orange. These naturally occurring sugars are accompanied by loads of other nutrients, and nutritionists encourage consumption of these foods.

In a recent issue of *Circulation*, the American Heart Association published a statement on "Dietary Sugars Intake and Cardiovascular Health," outlining the links between high consumption of added sugars and risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease. It also emphasized just how much added sugars Americans consume each day: an average of 22.2 teaspoons a day, totaling 355 calories. Male teens between 14 and 18 years old had the highest consumption, at 34.3 teaspoons (549 calories) a day. Those figures are much higher than

consumption rates from 30 years ago, when average added sugar intake was an estimated 235 calories a day.

With those facts in mind, the AHA decided to strengthen its previous recommendation to "minimize consumption" of beverages and foods with added sugars and instead offer specific upper limits. It recommends limiting added sugars to half of the discretionary calories recommended in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Those levels vary according to sex, age and level of physical activity, but for most women, it means limiting added sugars to 80 calories a day, and, for most men, to 144 calories a day. That's about 5 to 9 teaspoons of sugar, or 20-36 grams.

Unfortunately, Nutrition Facts labels don't make a distinction between added sugars and naturally occurring sugars. So, you need to do some investigation. If sugar content is more than a few grams on the Nutrition Facts label, look at the ingredients listing. If sugar or syrup is high on the list, the food has a substantial amount of added sugar.

If you drink regular soft drinks, which can have 8-10 teaspoons of added sugar in a 12-ounce can, substitute diet soda, water, milk, or a small amount of juice. And watch out for high-calorie coffee drinks: Just order plain coffee instead of that mocha.

*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](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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By Martha Filipic  
614-292-9833  
[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

**Editor:**  
This column was reviewed by Julie Shertzer, registered dietitian and program specialist for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Nutrition, in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

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**Section of Communications  
and Technology  
News and Media Relations**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
614-292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
330-263-3780

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