



High-fructose corn syrup just like sugar

I know people who refuse to eat anything that contains high-fructose corn syrup. Is it really so bad?

It appears not. And you can blame the scientific method for undue concerns about the sweetener.

In 2004, a paper published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggested that high-fructose corn syrup might be linked with weight gain. Ever since, the cheap, liquid alternative to table sugar used in a multitude of processed foods has become a pariah for many consumers interested in nutrition and maintaining a healthy weight.

First, some background. High-fructose corn syrup is made from corn. The type used to sweeten beverages contains 55 percent fructose and 42 percent glucose; another type, made of 42 percent fructose and 53 percent glucose, is used in other products. In comparison, table sugar, or sucrose, is made from sugar cane or sugar beets, and consists of 50 percent glucose and 50 percent fructose.

Before the 1960s, sucrose was used almost exclusively to sweeten soft drinks and other products, but the use of less-expensive high-fructose corn syrup steadily increased over the years. It now accounts for about half of the sugars used in the United States. The 2004 paper examined if there might be a link between the rise in obesity rates and the rise in high-fructose corn syrup during the same period.

When the 2004 paper was published, it spurred additional studies — typical in the scientific process.

Now, in five papers published in the same journal, scientists say the evidence indicates that high-fructose corn syrup is not much different from regular sugar as far as its effect on the body. Of course, all say more research is needed, especially long-term studies, but for now, the facts indicate high-fructose corn syrup is no better or worse than regular sugar.

Interestingly, pure fructose is metabolized differently than pure glucose or a fructose-glucose mix. Fructose is absorbed further down the small intestine, and over-consumption could increase triglyceride levels as well as cause increased calorie intake or decreased calorie expenditure. But high-fructose corn syrup is more similar to table sugar than it is to pure fructose, and it doesn't appear to be metabolized much differently from sucrose.

In the end, it appears we can't blame high-fructose corn syrup for rising obesity rates across the nation, except for the fact that, like other caloric sweeteners, it offers little nutrition for the calories it contains.

The bottom line? As always, eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein; choose healthful fats over saturated and trans fats; keep your calorie intake in balance with calorie needs; and keep intake of sugars and other "empty calories" to a minimum.

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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Editor:

Chow Line is taking a two-week break. You can expect the next column to be posted online on Jan. 9. Enjoy the holidays!

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To receive Chow Line by e-mail, send a message to filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu or sign up at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>.

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