



Why excess sugar is bad for you -- limit sugar for healthier life



The case for action

Sugar is so common, much consumed. It is an ingredient of many foods -- from traditional sweets to unexpected sources (bread, sauces, juices). Hence this *newsletter special* aims to advise why excess sugar is bad for you -- and to provide simple counsel to eat in a more healthy way. Simple (or free) sugars **compromise** nutrient quality of diets -- by providing significant energy without essential nutrients. Consuming excess sugar **increases** unhealthy weight gain, **heightens** risk of diseases (diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease) and **damages** teeth, causing dental caries.

What are free sugars?

Free sugars are mono and disachharides. They include monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods and beverages by manufacturers, cooks or consumers. They also include those naturally present in syrups, fruit juices or fruit juice concentrates.

Many people may not realize that much of the sugar they take in is in fact **hidden** in processed foods.

Which food or beverage is high in free sugars?

- ▶ confectionary items
- ▶ juices, syrups
- ▶ juice concentrates



What is recommended?

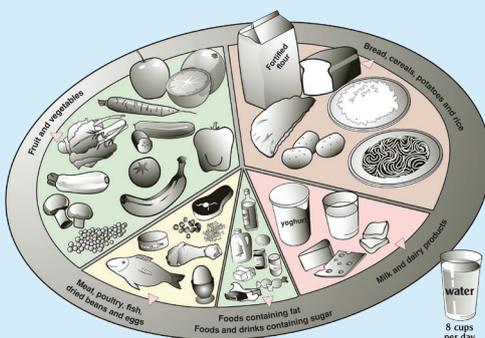
- Intake of free sugars, especially as sugary beverages, increases overall energy intake. It may reduce intake of food with nutritionally more adequate content, leading to unhealthy diet, dental caries, weight gain, increased risk of diabetes and heart disease.
- WHO recommends adults and children reduce daily intake of free sugars to **less than 10%** of total energy intake. For an adult with normal body weight, this is about 12 teaspoon, with a single teaspoon containing approx 5 g of sugar. A further reduction of sugar intake to **below 5%**, or 25 grams (6 teaspoons) per day would add health benefits.
- Hence, limiting free sugars intake to **<10%** of total daily energy is part of a healthy diet, a further reduction to **<5%** of total daily energy is encouraged for added health benefits.

How can we all reduce sugar intake?

- **avoid** beverages with added sugar: these include fizzy drinks, carbonated beverages, energy drinks, flavoured milks, many juices. Even fruit juices can have very high sugar content - hence consume in moderation.
- **drink** safe water instead of fizzy drinks, carbonated beverages or sugary juices.
- **eat** fresh fruits rather than drinking sugary juice.
- **select** healthier snack options -- those without added sugar. Choose fresh vegetables or fruits instead of snacks with added sugars (e.g. cakes, biscuits, chocolates).
- **choose** whole foods -- they have not been processed or refined and are hence lower in sugar. They are also free of additives and other artificial substances.
- **prefer** cereal-based snacks over cakes, biscuits, cookies, confectionery: they are lower in both sugar and fat.
- **check** food labels -- many low fat food options can be high in sugar.

What can policymakers & responsible businesses do?

- raise awareness of excess sugar consumption through media campaigns and social marketing.
- set thresholds to define **high sugar** beverages & food.
- implement sugar tax: for beverages & food high in sugar content.
- enact regulations on marketing of beverages & food to children and general public.
- voluntary and mandatory labelling of beverage & food content -- by industry, restaurants, fast food outlets.
- support healthy food, e.g. fresh vegetables and fruits.
- support simple trainings in healthy diet.
- set and monitor gradual sugar reduction in food and drink products.
- update national food composition database.
- monitor sugar intake and dietary sources of sugar at the population level.





Why excess sugar is bad for you -- five keys to a healthy diet

Breastfeed babies and young children

- from birth to 6 months of age, feed babies **exclusively** with breast milk (i.e. give them no other food or drink), and feed them **on demand** (i.e. as often as they want, day and night)
- at 6 months of age, introduce a variety of safe and nutritious foods to complement breastfeeding *and* continue breastfeeding until babies are 2 years of age or beyond
- do **not** add salt or sugar to foods for babies and young children.



Eat a variety of foods

- eat in a **balanced** way, including staple food, cereals, e.g. wheat, barley, rye, maize and rice or potato, roots, yam, taro, cassava, legumes (e.g. lentils, beans), vegetables, fruits and sources of protein, either plant protein (e.g. soya, chick peas, tofu) or animal protein (e.g. fish, chicken, eggs, milk).



Key information on "Eat smart - for good nutrition and to prevent NCDs" is available at <https://bit.ly/2MvQ9Dw>



Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit

- eat a wide variety of vegetables and fruit
- for snacks, choose fresh vegetables & fresh fruit, rather than food high in sugar, fats or salt.
- avoid overcooking vegetables & fruit because this leads to loss of important vitamins.
- when using canned or dried vegetables & fruit, choose varieties without added salt & sugar.



Eat moderate amounts of fats and oils

- use *unsaturated* vegetable oils (e.g. olive, soy, sunflower or corn oil) rather than animal fats or oils which are high in saturated fats (e.g. butter, ghee, lard, coconut & palm oils)
- choose white meat (e.g. poultry) and fish, which are generally lower in fats, in preference to red meat, which are generally higher in fats
- eat limited amounts of processed meats, if any, as these are high in fat *and* high in salt
- where possible, opt for *low fat* or *reduced fat* versions of milk and dairy products
- avoid processed, baked or fried foods that contain industrially produced trans-fats.



Eat less salt, consume less sugar

- when cooking & preparing food, **limit** salt & high-sodium condiments (soy sauce, fish sauce)
- **avoid** *monosodium glutamate*-containing meals
- **avoid** food (e.g. snacks) high in salt and high in sugar
- **limit** intake of soft drinks, soda or other drinks that are high in sugars (e.g. fruit juices, cordials, syrups, flavoured milks or yoghurt drinks)
- **choose** fresh fruits over sweet snacks (cookies, cakes, confectionaries)
- **balance** your diet -- eat and drink in a more healthy way <https://bit.ly/2MvQ9Dw>

Transformation to healthy diets by 2050 will require substantial dietary shifts.¹

for more sustainable diets *world-wide*, it would entail more than *doubling* the current consumption of healthy foods, e.g. fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and a *greater than 50% reduction* in consumption of added sugar *and* red meat, which is both less healthy and harms the natural eco-systems of our planet.¹

¹ Summary report of the EAT-Lancet Commission: *Food, Planet, Health. Healthy diets from sustainable food systems, 2019.*