



Sugar & Your Heart: Limiting Sugar May Reduce Risk for Heart Disease

You probably know that too much salt puts you and your family at risk of high blood pressure and is bad for heart health. But did you know that sugar carries risks as well? Research published in 2014 found a significant link between a diet heavy in sugar and death from heart disease. Over the course of 15 years, the study participants who received 25 percent or more of their daily calories from sugar were twice as likely to die from heart disease as those who consumed less than 10 percent of their calories from sugar.

The study looked at **added sugar**, which is any sugar that does not occur naturally in a food. Fruit and milk both naturally contain sugar. Added sugar includes everything from the teaspoon of sugar you stir in to your coffee, to the sugar you mix with other ingredients to make cookies, to the high fructose corn syrup added to a box of cereal at a manufacturing plant.

Read on for more information about the link between too much dietary sugar and heart disease, as well as for tips for the whole family to make cutting back easier.

Why Does Sugar Increase Heart Disease Risk?

In the past, medical researchers thought a diet heavy in sugar was damaging simply because it can promote heart disease risk factors, such as **obesity, diabetes** and **high blood pressure**. However, scientists are beginning to consider too much added dietary sugar as a risk factor on its own. Researchers have found that if someone eats an otherwise heart-healthy diet, has a healthy weight and is physically active, eating too much added sugar is **still** linked to an increased risk of death from heart disease. The reasons for this are currently unclear.

How Much Sugar Is Too Much?

Recommendations from the **American Heart Association** suggest men should consume no more than 9 teaspoons of sugar per day, and women no more than 6 teaspoons. As a reference point, note that one 12-ounce can of regular soda contains about 9 teaspoons of sugar.

When you read a packaged food's Nutrition Facts label, you will see a category called "Sugars," which will list the amount of sugar in grams. One teaspoon of sugar equals 4 grams. The



Nutrition Facts label only lists total sugars and does not break down sugar by categories for naturally occurring sugar versus added sugar. Fructose and lactose are common naturally occurring sugars.

Keep in mind, there are many names for sugar that may appear on ingredients lists on packaged food items. These are just a few of the more common examples: sucrose (table sugar), dextrose, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, brown sugar and honey. Turn the page for a more complete list of other names for sugar.

How Can I Cut Back on Sugar?

If you have a sweet tooth, it can be difficult to resist sugary foods and drinks. So how can you cut back on sugar without feeling deprived? And how can you convince your whole family to cut back as well? Try some of the following tips for reducing sugar intake for your family.

- **Limit soda and juices.** Sweetened-beverages such as soda and juices are a major source of added sugar in Americans' diets. If you struggle to give up regular soda, cut back to no more than 3 cans per week (36 oz.) for adults. Consider restricting your child from drinking soda except for on rare occasions, such as birthday parties. Also, beware of too much juice. Many juices have very little fruit and are sweetened with high fructose corn syrup.



- **Water is best.** The best beverage for health is plain water. Have water be the standard drink for the whole family at meal times. If you want more flavor, try plain (noncarbonated) or sparkling water with a little bit of fruit juice or sliced fruit added.
- **Swap in fruit.** It may be hard at first, but when you have a sugar craving, consider some fresh fruit instead of a cookie or other baked good. Pack fruit in your child’s school lunch every day. For times when you really want a dessert, a fruit-based one may be a better choice, as some of the sugar will be naturally occurring.
- **Know your sugars.** If you know how much sugar you eat and where it comes from, you can make better choices about which foods your family may want to give up in exchange for healthier ones. Read ingredients lists on packaged food items and look at the sugar content on the Nutrition Facts label. The label won’t tell you whether the grams of sugar are naturally occurring or added, but you can get an overall idea based on the types of sugars listed in the ingredients. Is the food sweetened primarily with naturally occurring fruits, or do you see sucrose, corn syrup and other sweeteners listed? Teach your children about which foods are high in added sugar and what foods they may have instead.



What’s That Sweet Taste? Sugar Goes by Many Names

Do you see the word sugar on your food package ingredients list? Keep reading. There are more than 50 names for sugar that can appear on food labels. The food item might have more sources of sugar than is apparent at a glance.

The list below is not complete, but it can show you just how pervasive sugar is in foods. Some types of sugar may be identified by more than one name.

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| agave nectar or syrup | honey |
| anhydrous dextrose | invert sugar |
| barley malt | lactose |
| beet sugar | liquid fructose |
| brown rice syrup | malt syrup |
| brown sugar | maltodextrin |
| cane juice | maltose |
| cane juice crystals | maple syrup |
| cane sugar | molasses |
| carob syrup | muscovado sugar |
| caster sugar | nectar (peach or pear nectar, for example) |
| coconut sugar | oat syrup |
| confectioners’ powdered sugar | pancake syrup |
| corn syrup | raw sugar |
| corn syrup solids | refiners’ syrup |
| date sugar | rice bran syrup |
| dextrose | sorghum |
| ethyl maltol | sorghum syrup |
| evaporated cane juice | sucrose (table sugar) |
| evaporated corn sweetener | sugar |
| fructose | sugar cane juice |
| fruit juice concentrate | tapioca syrup |
| galactose | treacle |
| glucose | turbinado sugar |
| high fructose corn syrup | white granulated sugar |

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Sugar and Cardiovascular Disease

- I’ve been keeping a food log. Does my **sugar intake** look OK?
- I have **diabetes**. Is my **blood glucose level** in the target range?
- Do I have other risk factors for heart disease, such as **high blood pressure, high cholesterol** and **obesity**?
- I need help in making dietary changes for me and my family. Is there a **dietician** or other health professional you can refer me to for help?

What Should I Do If I Have More Questions?

Ask them. You may think of dietary changes as something you need to do on your own, but your healthcare providers can help you. Lifestyle changes, such as adopting a heart-healthy diet, are a central, ongoing part of preventing and treating cardiovascular disease. Additionally, if you have children, making dietary changes now will benefit their heart health for the future.

SecondsCount is pleased to also provide this information as a downloadable PDF. We invite you to print it and share it with others, including your healthcare providers.