



Nutrition Nibbles

Is There Sugar In It?

College Corner: Get Started Now!

“Ughhh, doesn’t yogurt have a lot of sugar in it?” I get this question and variations of it often. “I try to limit my fruit intake. It’s so high in sugar, you know.” “That white milk they give kids at school is just full of sugars. They’re poisoning today’s youth!” In fact, just today I answered two different clients’ questions regarding “sugars” on the nutrition label. So what’s the answer? What does sugar on the label refer to? How much is too much? Should we avoid sugar altogether? Why do seemingly healthy foods like yogurt and fruit contain sugar?

Sugar is a carbohydrate found naturally in certain foods, including fruits and vegetables. Certain foods, namely sugar cane and sugar beets, contain a higher concentration of sugar or sucrose. Sugar is extracted from these foods, purified, and used to sweeten many other foods including cereals, breads, yogurts, flavored milks, among other foods. At the cellular level, your body cannot differentiate between natural sugars and added sugars. They are all broken down into a simple molecule called glucose. This glucose enters your bloodstream and raises your blood sugar (or blood glucose) levels.

If you’re a healthy, non-diabetic individual, your body will regulate your blood sugar levels, keep them within a healthy range, and you won’t even notice.

If sugar is a carbohydrate and many foods we eat are carbohydrate-containing (fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, lentils, dairy, desserts), then we all consume “sugar.” To avoid eating certain foods like fruits and starchy vegetables in order to limit our sugar intake is missing the point. What do fruits, veggies, whole grains, beans, and low-fat dairy offer that cookies and candy bars don’t? Nutrients! When we skip whole, unprocessed, natural foods in an attempt to limit our sugar intake, we miss out on vitamins, minerals, fiber, and fluids to name a few vital nutrients. Carbohydrates are our primary fuel source for the brain and preferred energy form for the muscles. These foods offer the best nutrition for fewer calories when compared to more processed items like desserts, granola bars, and the like.

Dumb strategy: Avoiding all foods that contain “sugar.”

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Do you have the start-of-the-school-year crazies? Are you feeling overwhelmed, overfed, and underexercised? Has the beginning of another academic year got you in a funk? Here are a few quick things you can do NOW to jumpstart your energy levels and boost your health:

- 1. Eat breakfast.** Fuel your body and brain for a big day of school. Short on time? Grab something quick and easy--Greek yogurt and a piece of fruit--as you fly out the door.
- 2. Arm yourself with a water bottle.** Water is the best, most natural way to hydrate. Sip on water throughout the day. It also keeps you awake in class!
- 3. Walk or bike everywhere!** If you live close enough to campus, use your commute to get your cardio for the day. Even 5 or 10 minutes of movement will boost your energy level for hours.

**Questions or Comments? Email me at
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Sugar continued...

Smarter strategy: Watching out for obvious sources of “added sugar.”

How can we limit our added sugar intake? Look on the nutrition label but not where you think. First, the term “sugars” on the Nutrition Facts panel does not differentiate between sugar that is found naturally in the food (like the lactose milk sugar found in dairy foods) and any sugar that has been added to the food (for example, sucrose added to a fruited yogurt). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that we limit our intake of added sugars. With the way the current nutrition label is designed, there is no way to tell how many grams of added sugars you are ingesting from a packaged food. Instead, look at the Ingredients List. There you will find ingredients listed by weight--the first ingredient listed is present in the greatest amount, the last ingredient in the least amount. If you see sugar buzz words like sucrose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, or syrup listed near the top of the list--look around for a better alternative. Make a game of finding foods with the fewest types of sugar listed in the ingredients.

Another surefire strategy for limiting your added sugar intake is to choose whole, unprocessed foods. Shop the perimeter of the store and add fresh fruits and vegetables to your cart. Throw in some unflavored nonfat or 1% milk or unsweetened, lowfat milk alternatives. Choose plain, nonfat yogurt (top with fruit for natural sweetness). Purchase plain whole grains like brown rice and quinoa. Pick out lean proteins, including plant-based beans and lentils. Put the cookies and ice cream back on the shelf. Skip the soda aisle.

Ok, I’m off my soapbox now. The next time you ask me about the “sugars in food,” I’ll smile sweetly and remind you that limiting your added sugar intake is just one way to improve the quality of your diet.

Go Get ‘Em! continued...

4. Add one fruit and one vegetable to your day. Fruit makes an easy addition to breakfast (think bananas and apples) or a delicious dessert (frozen grapes, anyone?) Add some extra veggies to your sandwich or burrito for a dash of fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

5. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in, breathe out. Lower your shoulders, stretch your arms, roll your neck. You will feel more relaxed and clear-headed in no time.

6. Turn in early. Make a point of going to bed a few minutes earlier than your usual. Extra zzzzz’s can leave you feeling more refreshed in the morning. Set a cell phone alert to remind you to wind down early.

7. Stock your pantry with good-for-you fuel. Having a healthy snack within reach can keep you from making a late night fast food run.

Use these tips to have a spectacular start to a new academic year. Go get ‘em!

Pantry Staples:

- Fruit--apples, oranges, bananas
- Veggies--carrot and celery sticks
- Hummus
- Babybel cheeses
- Whole grain crackers
- Whole grain granola bars
- High fiber cereal
- Milk--nonfat dairy, almond, or soy
- Greek yogurt
- Lowfat cottage cheese