KICK THE CAN

Sugar and Health

SUGAR FACTS

Sugar goes by many names. The term "sugar" refers to sweet-tasting carbohydrates including sucrose, glucose, fructose, and lactose. *Naturally-occurring* sugars found in nutrient-rich foods and beverages such as fruits, vegetables, and milk are an expected component of a healthy, balanced diet.[1] Sugar that is added to food — commonly in the form of sucrose or high-fructose corn syrup — adds empty, nutrition-less calories to our diet.[2]

Americans eat far too much sugar. Added sugar in processed and packaged foods and beverages has dramatically increased our consumption of sugar.[1] Today, the typical American consumes 15–21 teaspoons of added sugar per day,[3] which far exceeds the recommended daily limit of 5–9 teaspoons.[2] A single 20-ounce bottle of soda contains 17 teaspoons of added sugars,[4] which is nearly double the upper daily limit.

Sugar-sweetened beverages* are the single largest source of added sugar in the U.S. diet.[5] Roughly one-third of added sugar in the U.S. diet is consumed in the form of soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages.[3] The simplest way to decrease sugar consumption is to drink fewer sugar-sweetened beverages.

High fructose corn syrup (HFCS). HFCS and sugar are chemically very similar. Typically, both contain almost equal portions of glucose and fructose and therefore contribute equally to weight gain.[6] Two-thirds of all HFCS is consumed as soda.[7]

SUGAR & HEALTH

High sugar intake is detrimental to health. High intake of sugar contributes to weight gain and the development of obesity. A recent review commissioned by the World Health Organization found that reduced intake of sugars (compared to other carbohydrates) significantly reduces body weight, while increased intake of sugars increases body weight by a similar amount.[8] High sugar intake is also associated with increased risk for diabetes,[9] risk factors for heart disease,[2,10,11] and dental caries.[12]

Is HFCS worse than table sugar? There is little evidence, as of yet, that HFCS has biochemically contributed to the obesity epidemic other than through its massive consumption.[6] However, one recent study found that the HFCS used in many popular sugar-sweetened beverages had significantly more fructose than glucose, much more than previously assumed.[13] Since fructose has more harmful effects than glucose when consumed in high amounts,[14,15] if this finding proves correct, this form of HFCS would likely be more detrimental than sucrose.

** **NOTE:** Sugar-sweetened beverages refers to all beverages with added sugars including carbonated soft drinks, juice drinks, sports drinks, flavored and enhanced waters, sweetened teas and energy drinks.*

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