

## Sugar

Sugar, like starch, is a carbohydrate. There are many different types of and names for sugar. For example sucrose or 'table sugar' is added to drinks, baked goods and confectionery. Fructose is naturally found in fruit and honey and lactose is naturally present in milk.

Glucose is one of the simplest forms of sugar and is the basic building block of starch. Starch is the main form of carbohydrate found in bread, pasta, potatoes, rice, pulses, whole grains and cereals. Glucose is also the type of sugar that circulates in the blood, often referred to as 'blood sugar' or 'blood glucose', and provides the body with energy.

### Is sugar bad for you?

No, it is the amount and how frequently you eat sugar that matters. Carbohydrates are the body's main energy source and sugar is an important source of carbohydrates. Sugar also has an important role in providing flavour and texture to foods. As sugar contains calories but few nutrients, eating too much sugar and foods and drinks rich in added sugars, instead of other foods, may make your diet less nutritious.

### Can sugar cause health problems?

The only health problem directly linked to sugar is tooth decay. Bacteria in the mouth use sugars to produce tooth-damaging acid. The risk of tooth decay increases when sugars are eaten frequently, especially sugars that have been added to foods. To help look after teeth it is best to keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes and to brush your teeth regularly.



### Does sugar make you fat?

Weight gain occurs when we eat more calories than we burn. Sugary foods and drinks can only make us gain weight if overall we eat more calories than we use for energy.

### Common names for sugars added to foods

|   |                      |                  |
|---|----------------------|------------------|
| Glucose   | Fructose<br>Maltose  | Sucrose          |
| Syrups<br>(e.g. glucose fructose syrup, corn syrup,<br>maple syrup) |                      |                  |
| Invert sugar  | Dextrose<br>Molasses | Honey<br>Treacle |

One level teaspoon of sugar (4g) contains 16 calories and as sugary foods (e.g. chocolate, cakes and biscuits) and drinks taste great and can be rich in calories, it is easy to eat too many calories from sugary products.

Some research suggests that sugary drinks make it harder for us to regulate the overall amount of calories eaten and a regular intake may be a factor contributing to obesity in children.

### Does eating too much sugar cause diabetes?

No, diabetes is caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. However being overweight increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. People with a family history of diabetes are advised to enjoy a healthy diet and regular exercise to control their weight.

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for energy.

## Are low calorie sweeteners bad for you?

There is no evidence to suggest that low calorie sweeteners, such as saccharin, aspartame and sucralose, are bad for you. All ingredients added to foods, including low calorie sweeteners, undergo rigorous safety testing before being approved safe for human consumption. Low calorie sweeteners provide a sweet taste to food but little or no calories and they are often used in products such as diet soft drinks, sugar-free chewing gum and confectionery and yogurts.

People with phenylketonuria (PKU), a rare genetic condition, need to restrict their intake of phenylalanine. This is an amino acid (a building block for protein) which is found naturally in many foods and as part of the sweetener aspartame.

## How much sugar is OK?

A moderate amount of sugar can be eaten as part of a healthy balanced diet. The maximum recommended daily intake of sugars (excluding lactose) is approximately 60 grams per day (10% of our total calorie intake). This includes honey, table sugar and sugars in fruit juices and processed foods.

Many food labels provide information on the amount of sugar in foods but do not distinguish between total sugars and added sugars. The nearer the sugar is to the start of the ingredients list, the greater the amount in the product. Traffic Light Labelling on some food and drink packaging provides a quick guide to the level of fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar in foods and drinks. A red light for sugar means a high sugar content, an amber light means it has medium sugar content and a green light means it is low in sugar.



## Is sugar addictive?

There is no evidence to indicate that sugar is addictive in humans. Sugar helps to make food taste good and like many enjoyable things, it can stimulate the brain's pleasure centre to release "feel-good" chemicals called endorphins.



## How to eat less sugar

Traffic light labelling for sugar can be used as a quick guide to judge if a packaged food is high or low in sugars. Also look for the 'Carbohydrates (of which sugars)' figure in the nutrition information panel on the label. A high sugar content is more than 15g sugars per 100g and a low content is 5g sugars or less per 100g. Values in between indicate a medium amount of sugar.

Portion size is also important, for example, while jam is high in sugar, you only use a small amount on your toast, whereas a 500ml bottle of cola provides 54 grams or 13 teaspoons of sugar which is approximately 200 calories.

| Cut down on...                       | Fill up on...   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Sweet Biscuits, Cakes, Confectionery | Fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, malt loaf, plain biscuits, fruit bun, wholemeal scone                |
| Sweet puddings                       | Baked apple, summer pudding, yogurt or fromage frais with puréed fruit                                      |
| Canned fruit in syrup                | Canned fruit in juice   |
| Sugary drinks                        | Pure juice diluted with fizzy water, diet fizzy drinks, milk, fruit smoothies, no added sugar squash, water |

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