

Ask the Doc: June: Sugar: How Much Is Too Much?

Introduction:

Sugar intake is a major factor in determining a woman's risk of dying from a heart attack, stroke and complications of diabetes. In addition, a high sugar intake is a **major cause of obesity**, which is associated with an increased risk of developing **breast cancer***. There is extensive research that **reduction in sugar intake can have major health benefits**.

Recent guidelines recommend that women should restrict their sugar intake to 6 grams a day or less for maximum health benefits. This is easier said than done. Consider the following:

- 12 oz. can of coke contains 9 grams of sugar (and a similar sized glass of grape juice contains over 30 grams of sugar).
- A leading brand of yogurt contains 24 grams of sugar per 8 oz. container.
- A bowl of Fruit Loops contains 12 grams of sugar plus calories from milk.

The problem: Cannot Trust Labels

- Most packaged or processed foods are bursting with sugar.
- Manufacturers use a variety of tricks to masquerade the presence of sugar in their products. Added sugars like fructose, honey, dextrose, (and 53 other names for sugar) can be hidden in the labels.
- Serving size must be taken into consideration when reading food labels.
- One clue that a product is high in sugar is when the label states "low in fats." The sugars are added to improve taste, which occurs when fats are removed.

- Be careful when the manufacturer states the product contains only **natural sugar**. (Grams of natural sugars that occur in fruits and berries are part of your total intake of grams). However, the natural sugars found in fruits and berries are high in fiber, which slows absorption and thus delays hunger.

Three strategies for lowering sugar intake:

1. Think what you drink

- **Soft drinks and energy drinks** are a major source of sugar and should be avoided.
 - Recommend: Switch to water or fruit infused water which tastes good and has zero calories.
 - Avoid adding sugar to your coffee, tea, etc. Try to get by with soy or almond milk that is low in calories.

2. Substitute sugar calories for healthy calories

- **Eat more protein:** fish, lean meats, chicken, eggs or plant protein found in beans, broccoli (gram for gram broccoli has more protein than meat and also contains valuable nutrients).
- Get more calories from **healthy oils** such as olive, avocado, or coconut oil.
- Eat more **Leafy vegetables:** spinach, kale & chard.

2.

- And don't forget **Avocados**, a true **super-food** that should be an essential component of any weight loss program. Remember plant fats are a healthy source of calories that are of major value in delaying hunger.

3. **Art of snacking: Adopt a “Never Go Hungry” Diet**

- Hunger is the enemy of long-term diet success. Two basic steps to a Never Go Hungry Diet:
 - 1. Eat a low sugar low carb diet and stop eating as soon as you feel “full”. (Carbs are found in breads, and pasta as well as candies, cookies and cake).
 - If you get hungry between meals have a plan for snacking to bridge the gap between meals with a snack high in fiber and low in sugar.
 - Examples of high fiber low sugar snacks:
 - Nuts, any kind... also peanut and almond butter.
 - Seeds, chia my favorite, but also pumpkin, sesame, flax, hemp.
 - Berries in small amounts.
- Remember, the goal in snacking is to eat just enough healthy food to bridge the gap between meals.

Final Notes: Avoid artificial sweeteners. They have not proven to be of value in helping women to lose weight. However, it takes approximately one month to lose the addiction to sugar and artificial sweeteners might be helpful during this limited time period.

* **Clarification: Obesity** is a risk factor for developing breast cancer for **women 50 years and older**. Obesity before the age of 50 has not proven to be a risk factor, however, obesity in women under 50 sets the stage for future obesity.

If you have questions, contact us at msprouse@beawarefoundation.org

The End