

Sugar 101 – Source, The American Heart Association

Naturally occurring sugars and added sugars

There are two types of sugars in American diets: naturally occurring sugars and added sugars.

- Naturally occurring sugars are found *naturally* in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose).
- Added sugars include *any* sugars or caloric sweeteners that are *added* to foods or beverages during processing or preparation (such as putting sugar in your coffee or adding sugar to your cereal). Added sugars (or added sweeteners) can include natural sugars such as white sugar, brown sugar and honey as well as other caloric sweeteners that are chemically manufactured (such as high fructose corn syrup).

You can use sugars to help enhance your diet. Adding a **limited** amount of sugar to improve the taste of foods (especially for children) that provide important nutrients, such as whole-grain cereal, low-fat milk or yogurt, is better than eating nutrient-poor, highly sweetened foods.

Sources of added sugars

The major sources of added sugars in American diets are regular soft drinks, sugars, candy, cakes, cookies, pies and fruit drinks (fruitades and fruit punch); dairy desserts and milk products (ice cream, sweetened yogurt and sweetened milk); and other grains (cinnamon toast and honey-nut waffles).

Finding added sugars in food

Unfortunately, you can't tell easily by looking at the nutrition facts panel of a food if it contains added sugars. The line for "sugars" includes both added and natural sugars. Naturally occurring sugars are found in milk (lactose) and fruit (fructose). Any product that contains milk (such as yogurt, milk or cream) or fruit (fresh, dried) contains some *natural* sugars.

Reading the ingredient list on a processed food's label can tell you if the product contains added sugars, just not the exact amount if the product also contains natural sugars.

Names for added sugars on labels include:

- Brown sugar
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Fruit juice concentrates
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Invert sugar
- Malt sugar
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Sugar
- Sugar molecules ending in "ose" (dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose)
- Syrup

Furthermore, some products include terms related to sugars. Here are some common terms and their meanings:

- **Sugar-Free** – less than 0.5 g of sugar per serving
- **Reduced Sugar or Less Sugar** – at least 25 percent less sugars per serving compared to a standard serving size of the traditional variety
- **No Added Sugars or Without Added Sugars** – no sugars or sugar-containing ingredient such as juice or dry fruit is added during processing
- **Low Sugar** – not defined or allowed as a claim on food labels

Although you can't isolate the calories per serving from added sugars with the information on a nutrition label, it may be helpful to calculate the calories per serving from *total* sugars (added sugars and naturally occurring sugars). To do this, multiply the grams of sugar by 4 (there are 4 calories per 1 gram of sugar). For example, a product containing 15 g of sugar has 60 calories from sugar per serving.

Keep in mind that if the product has no fruit or milk products in the ingredients, all of the sugars in the food are from added sugars. If the product contains fruit or milk products, the total sugar per serving listed on the label will include added and naturally occurring sugars.

Need to reduce added sugars

Although sugars are not harmful in small amounts to the body, our bodies don't *need* sugars to function properly. Added sugars contribute additional calories and zero nutrients to food. Reducing the amount of added sugars we eat cuts calories and can help you improve your heart health and control your weight.

The American Heart Association recommends limiting the amount of **added sugars** you consume to no more than half of your daily discretionary calorie allowance. For most American women, this is no more than 100 calories per day and no more than 150 calories per day for men (or about 6 teaspoons per day for women and 9 teaspoons per day for men).

Discretionary calories and added sugars

You have a daily energy need — the amount of calories (or energy units) your body needs to function and provide energy for your activities. Think of your daily energy need as a budget. You'd organize a real budget with "essentials" (things like rent and utilities) and "extras" (such as vacation and entertainment). In a daily calorie budget, the essentials are the minimum number of calories you need to meet your nutrient needs.

Select low-fat and no-sugar-added foods to make good "nutrient buys" with your budget. Depending on the foods you choose and the amount of physical activity you do each day, you may have calories left over for "extras" that can be used on treats like solid fats, added sugars and alcohol. These are discretionary calories, or calories to be spent at your discretion.

A person's discretionary calorie budget varies depending on how physically active they are and how many calories they need to consume to meet their daily nutrient requirements. The American Heart Association recommends that no more than half of a person's daily discretionary calorie allowance be spent on added sugars.

Common sources of discretionary calories (in addition to added sugars) are fats, oils and alcohol. Fats are the most concentrated source of calories.