

Sugar Affects Heart Health

Many Americans consume too much added sugar, which can put their health at risk. Added sugars are sugars and syrups put in food or drinks when they are processed or prepared. They provide calories but no other nutritional value. Additional sugar can also be found in items that may not be considered sweet, like cured meats, soups, packaged pasta sauces, salad dressings, bread, yogurt, biscuits, and condiments, such as ketchup.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends no added sugars for children under two. People two and older should keep added sugars to less than 10% of their total daily calories. For example, if an adult consumes 2,000 calories a day, no more than 200 calories should come from added sugars. Twelve teaspoons of sugar is about 200 calories.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sugar consumption far exceeds recommended guidelines. The American Heart Association's recommended daily limits for added sugar are:

- Men: up to 9 teaspoons
- Women: up to 6 teaspoons

Sugar-sweetened beverages such as energy drinks, sodas, and sports drinks are the largest sources of added sugar in the average American's diet. These account for more than one-third of the added sugar we consume as a nation. Other sources include cakes, cookies, pastries, and similar treats.

Food manufacturers must now list the amount of added sugars on the Nutrition Facts label in grams and as a percent of daily value. Listing the total amount of added sugars means that consumers can easily determine how much added sugar is in a food or beverage. Always read the labels to see how much sugar is contained in what you are eating or drinking. This information helps shoppers make smart choices.

Added sugars have a lot of aliases. When reading labels, look for terms like corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, evaporated cane juice, glucose, fructose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, and sucrose.

Research has shown that people who consume high levels of sugar are prone to heart disease.

Sugar occurs naturally in all foods that contain carbohydrates, such as fruits and vegetables, grains, and dairy. Consuming whole foods that contain natural sugar is okay. Plant foods also have high amounts of fiber, essential minerals, and antioxidants, and dairy foods contain protein and calcium.

Follow these tips to help you decrease added sugars in your meals. Even a slight change is one step closer to a healthier meal pattern.

1. Make smart substitutions. Replace pop and juice with healthier options like low-fat milk, carbonated water, or unsweetened tea.

2. Replace food triggers with more wholesome, real food substitutions. Candy is one of the most addictive of trigger foods. If candy is a major part of your life, replace it with unsweetened dried fruit.
3. Be the food label expert. Use labels to compare the sugar content of similar products and choose the one with lower sugar.
4. Limit sweets. Enjoy your favorite sweet indulgence in moderation once in a while and without guilt. Deprivation usually backfires.

Paying attention to how much sugar you consume is important for a heart-healthy lifestyle. A treat every now and then is okay, but if you consume too much sugar, it can negatively impact your health.