

ARE SUGARS ALL THE SAME

Understanding the distinction between added dietary sugars and naturally occurring sugars is essential for making informed dietary choices. Naturally occurring sugars are found naturally in foods such as fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. These sugars come packaged with essential nutrients like fiber, vitamins, and minerals, which contribute to overall health. In contrast, added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added to foods and beverages during processing or preparation. These added sugars provide sweetness but little to no nutritional value, often leading to excess calorie consumption without the accompanying nutrients found in whole foods. Differentiating between these two types of sugars allows individuals to prioritize whole, nutrient-rich foods while minimizing intake of added sugars, promoting better health outcomes.

How Added Sugars Effect Heart Health

The concept of added sugar, referring to sugars and syrups added to foods and beverages during processing or preparation, is intricately linked to heart health. Excessive consumption of added sugars has been associated with an increased risk of developing heart disease and other cardiovascular complications. Diets high in added sugars can lead to weight gain, elevated levels of LDL cholesterol (often referred to as "bad" cholesterol), increased triglycerides, and inflammation, all of which are risk factors for heart disease. Moreover, excessive sugar intake has been linked to insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, and hypertension, further exacerbating cardiovascular risk. Recognizing the impact of added sugars on heart health underscores the importance of reducing their consumption and opting for whole, nutrient-dense foods to support cardiovascular wellness.

How To Decrease Your Consumption Of Added Sugars:

- Look at the nutrition facts labels of the foods you consume. When selecting foods, choose those with the lowest amounts of added sugar. Ideally this number will be 0g, but that may not always be the case.
- Limit your consumption of sugary beverages. The leading source of added sugar in U.S. diets is sugar-sweetened drinks (soda, juices, smoothies, meal replacement drinks, sports drinks, teas, coffee...etc.)
 - Try flavored sparkling waters, whole fruit smoothies, diluted 100% fruit juices, unsweetened coffees, unsweetened teas, water, unsweetened coconut water, and unsweetened dairy alternatives.
 - Add your own honey, sugar, agave nectar, or maple syrup to your foods and drinks to better control the amount of added sugars in your foods.
- Limit your consumption of processed foods such as cookies, cereals, cakes, chips, candies, granola bars, and fast foods as these foods usually contain high amounts of added sugars.
- Replace some of your fruit juice intake with whole fruit. Although fruit juice does contain some vitamins and minerals, it lacks the fiber and other vital nutrients found in whole fruit. Our bodies treat fruit juice just like any other sugary beverage. If consuming fruit juice—make sure it is 100% 0g of added sugar and dilute it with water (especially for kids).
- When choosing dairy products, opt for plain unsweetened products (i.e. plain yogurt, plain cream cheese, non-flavored milk). Add fresh fruit/frozen fruit to plain yogurt and to cream cheese to make your own flavored products.
- Limit your consumption of sweets and baked goods. Enjoy treats like cakes, cookies, pies, candies, chocolate...etc. sometimes and in small amounts! You do not need to restrict them from your diet.
 - You can also choose to make baked goods yourself and use whole grains and zero calorie/low calorie sweeteners like Monk Fruit and Stevia.
- Alternative Sweeteners such as artificial sweeteners, sugar alcohols, and novel sweeteners can also be used to decrease your overall consumption of added sugars. Though concerns about the safety of artificial sweeteners (sucralose, aspartame, saccharin, & acesulfame) exist, it is important to notate that the correlations (if any) that have been found cannot be wholeheartedly supported.
- Sugar alcohols (sorbitol, xylitol, mannitol), mainly found in gum and candy, are other alternatives to sugar. These alternatives are not a zero-calorie option, but rather a low-calorie option. Sugar alcohols naturally occur in fruits and vegetables, but when consumed in high amounts can cause gastric distress.
- Newer to the market are the novel sweeteners (stevia, monk fruit, allulose). These alternatives have not been studied long, but they are generally recognized as safe by the FDA. These sweeteners are derived from plants and fruits, and are a great low-calorie option.