few topics in nutrition have received more attention in recent years than sugars and added sugars. The role of sugars in food, how much sugar we should eat, and the impact of sugars on health are important questions that nutrition experts have researched for decades. This fact sheet provides information on added sugars, including: the definition, the inclusion on the revised Nutrition Facts label, and how they can fit into a healthy eating pattern.

WHAT ARE ADDED SUGARS?

Sugars can be found naturally in some foods and beverages or added as ingredients in others. While flavoring is a common reason sugars are added to foods and beverages, sugars also provide key technical functions by enhancing color, bulk, and texture, as well as safety by ensuring proper fermentation and preservation. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines (DGA) describe added sugars as “syrups and other caloric sweeteners used as a sweetener in other food products.” The official definition of the term “added sugars” has been established by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). FDA defines added sugars as sugars that are:
- added during the processing of foods, or are packaged as such (like a bag of sugar);
- free, mono- and disaccharides;
- sugars from syrups and honey; and
- sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices that are in excess of what would be expected from the same volume of 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice of the same type.

The FDA definition of “added sugars” does not include:
- fruit or vegetable juice concentrated from 100 percent fruit juice that is sold to consumers; and
- the fruit component of fruit spreads.
While many whole foods contain naturally-occurring sugars (e.g., sucrose, glucose or fructose in fruit and lactose in milk), these are not considered added sugars when found in whole foods. Other sweeteners such as sugar alcohols (e.g., erythritol and xylitol), low-calorie sweeteners (e.g., aspartame and sucralose) and no-calorie natural sweeteners (e.g., stevia leaf extract and monk fruit extract) are also not considered added sugars.

**ADDED SUGARS IN THE AMERICAN DIET**

The majority of Americans consume more added sugars than is recommended. Current estimates show the average American consumes about 13.5 percent of their calories from added sugars. The DGA recommend limiting intake of added sugars to less than 10 percent of total calories to assist in building healthy eating patterns. A healthy eating pattern is defined by the DGA as meeting “nutrient and food group needs through nutrient-dense food and beverage choices and staying within calorie limits.”

Nutrient-dense foods are packed with vitamins and minerals, contain minimal calories added from fats, sugars, or refined starches, and contribute to adequate intakes of nutrients and other substances that may have positive health effects. The current and previous editions of the DGA recommend eating nutrient-dense foods and beverages more often. While added sugars can be found in nutrient-dense foods, they are a source of calories. With obesity as a primary health concern, a significant amount of research has investigated the relationship between added sugars and weight gain. Studies have not demonstrated that added sugars uniquely cause weight gain more than other calorie sources. Higher intakes of added sugars that result in calorie consumption above energy needs, however, are associated with excess body weight. Few studies have examined the direct impact of added sugars intake in nutrient-dense foods and beverages on body weight or other health outcomes. Instead, the majority of studies are self-reported, association-focused in foods and beverages such as snacks, sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages.

Foods with added sugars can contribute to weight gain like any other calorie source. Research consistently shows that weight gain occurs when calorie intake (whether it be from carbohydrates (including sugars), fat and/or protein) exceeds calories burned. More research that objectively measures added sugars intake from both foods and beverages as part of a healthy eating pattern and lifestyle is needed to understand the relationship between added sugars, nutrient-dense foods, and weight gain.

**A HEALTHY EATING PATTERN CAN INCLUDE ADDED SUGARS**

A healthy eating pattern focuses on overall diet quality, proper portion sizes and can include added sugars within recommended amounts. In building a healthy eating pattern, the majority of nutrients should come from nutrient-dense foods and beverages. Nutrient-dense foods and beverages that contain added sugars can help increase consumption of key nutrients that Americans don’t get enough of such as calcium, fiber, iron, potassium and vitamin D, which the DGA has identified as “shortfall nutrients.”

To help meet recommended levels of these shortfall nutrients, the DGA encourage consuming more dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Food products from these categories may contain added sugars. When choosing from these food product categories, consider the following benefits and strategies to select nutrient-dense forms.
Dairy Products

Milk, yogurt and other low-and non-fat dairy products offer a variety of essential health benefits. In addition to protein, dairy is also an excellent source of calcium, potassium and vitamin D. Including low- and non-fat dairy products as part of a healthy eating pattern can help reduce risk for diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity, as well as increase muscle and bone health.

To reduce calorie intake from added sugars in dairy products, consider incorporating plain or unsweetened versions or versions sweetened with low-and no-calorie sweeteners.

Fruit Products

Whole fruit (fresh, frozen, canned and dried) contributes important nutrients to the diet, such as fiber, potassium, folic acid and vitamin C. Whole fruit should make up the majority of fruit intake. 100% fruit juice also contributes to meeting daily fruit intake recommendations. Naturally tart fruits (e.g., cranberries) that may be sweetened to make them palatable can be part of a healthy eating pattern.

Fruits deliver important nutrients and other compounds such as antioxidants and other bioactives, which can protect against cardiovascular disease. When considering dried fruit and juice options, read labels to consider how the amount of calories, total sugars, and added sugars fit into daily recommendations.

Whole Grain Products

Breads, cereals and other whole grain products contain vital nutrients like fiber, folic acid and iron. Because whole grains such as oats and whole wheat have been shown to support heart health, contribute to weight management, and be an important source of fiber, it’s recommended that half of all grains consumed should be whole grains. When choosing between whole grain products, consider the amount of whole grain, nutrients such as fiber, and calories in addition to the amount of total sugars and added sugars per serving.

ADDED SUGARS ON THE NUTRITION FACTS LABEL

In May 2016, the FDA announced that by July 2018, the Nutrition Facts label will display added sugars information in grams per serving and percent Daily Value. The decision to declare added sugars on the revised label is based, in part, on recommendations from the 2015-2020 DGA. The DGA and FDA recognize that added sugars can be a part of a healthy eating pattern. The intent of requiring added sugars on the revised label is to assist consumers in maintaining healthful dietary practices by increasing awareness of the amount of added sugars in foods and beverages.

When the revised labels hit shelves on or before July 26, 2018, added sugars information will appear as “Includes Xg Added Sugars,” which will be indented directly below “Total Sugars.” The indention indicates that added sugars...
TIPS TO NAVIGATE SUGARS INFORMATION ON THE REVISED NUTRITION FACTS LABEL

- Use the “Total Sugars” line to determine the full amount of sugars in a labeled serving. This amount represents naturally-occurring and added sugars.
- Use the “Includes Xg Added Sugars” line to determine the amount of sugars that have been added. This amount does not include naturally-occurring sugars.

are included in the amount of “Total Sugars” per serving, not in addition to “Total Sugars.” Manufacturers may start providing this information before the final deadline.

Consumer research from the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation and the FDA has shown that consumers will need time to become more familiar with added sugars information on the revised Nutrition Facts label. When FDA asked participants to identify sugars that have been added, the most common error made was to overestimate the amount by adding “Added Sugars” to “Total Sugars” or “Sugars.” IFIC Foundation consumer research also observed this misinterpretation and showed improved comprehension of labels that used “Total Sugars” instead of “Sugars.” FDAs revised Nutrition Facts label includes the word “Total” before “Sugars” and the wording “Includes Xg Added Sugars” appears below “Total Sugars” to reduce the potential for public misunderstanding.

BUILDING AN EATING PATTERN FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH

Eating the right mix of carbohydrates, fats and proteins, as well as vitamins and minerals from foods and beverages while staying within your calorie needs is essential to building a healthy eating pattern. Seeking or avoiding one ingredient at the expense of others can lead to poor health. Foods and beverages with added sugars can be part of a healthy eating pattern, and with the right approach can help with consumption of key nutrients that many Americans don’t get enough of. The best advice is to enjoy a balanced approach without extreme restriction or avoidance. Instead, develop a healthy eating style that focuses on the full nutrition profile of your food and beverage choices, strive to obtain essential nutrients from a variety of foods and beverages, and allow for the occasional treat.

REFERENCES