

**REPORT OF THE CHAIR - PREVENTION AND SOCIAL CARE REFORM  
CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE - 20 MARCH 2017**

**SUGAR IN OUR DIETS**

Most adults and children in the UK eat too much sugar. Cut down by eating fewer sugary foods, such as sweets, cakes and biscuits, and drinking fewer sugary drinks.

Many people can often be heard saying they have a 'sweet tooth' or are 'addicted to sugar'.

These common sayings highlight just how big a part of our daily diet sugar has become over the years.

From breakfast cereals and pastries to soft drinks and snacks, thousands of food and drink products contain added sugars, with the supply of these products driven by people's ever-increasing demand for sweet produce.

A preference for sweet food starts at an early age and remains with us throughout our lives. We even have scores of taste buds dedicated only to tasting sweetness.

However, the role of sugar in our diet is a controversial topic, as high intake of the substance can contribute to a number of health problems.

Most people are aware of the fact that too much sugar can lead to:  
Tooth decay  
Weight gain  
Obesity-related complications including type 2 diabetes, hypertension and heart disease.

The kind of sugar we eat too much of is known as "free sugars". Free sugars are any sugars added to food or drinks, or found naturally in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices.

Many foods and drinks that contain added sugars can be high in energy (measured in either kilojoules/kJ or calories/kcal) and often have few other nutrients. Eating these foods too often can mean you eat more calories than you need, which can lead to weight gain and obesity.

Adults are advised not to eat more than 30g of free sugars a day, which is roughly seven sugar cubes. Children should have less than this.

Sugary foods and drinks can also cause tooth decay, especially if you eat them between meals. The longer the sugary food is in contact with teeth, the more damage it can cause.

The sugars found naturally in whole fruit are less likely to cause tooth decay, because the sugars are contained within the structure of the fruit. But when fruit is juiced or blended, the sugars are released. Once released, these sugars can damage teeth, especially if fruit juice is drunk frequently. When fruit is dried, some sugars can be released, and dried fruit has a tendency to stick to teeth.

Your combined total of drinks from fruit juice, vegetable juice and smoothies should not be more than 150ml a day – which is a small glass. For example, if you have 150ml of orange juice and 150ml smoothie in one day, you'll have exceeded the recommendation by 150ml.

Remember to keep juice and smoothies to mealtimes, as they can cause tooth decay. Watch out for drinks that say "juice drink" on the pack, as they are unlikely to count towards your 5 A DAY and can be high in sugar.

Try to swap dried fruit for fresh fruit. To reduce the risk of tooth decay, dried fruit is best enjoyed as part of a meal, such as dessert, and not as a between-meal snack.

The government recommends that free or added sugars shouldn't make up more than 5% of the energy (calories) you get from food and drink each day. That's a maximum of 30g of added sugar a day for adults, which is roughly seven sugar cubes.

Children should have less – no more than 19g a day for children aged 4 to 6 years old (5 sugar cubes), and no more than 24g (6 sugar cubes) for children aged 7 to 10 years old.

Added sugars are found in foods such as sweets, cakes, biscuits, chocolate, and some fizzy drinks and juice drinks – these are the sugary foods we should cut down on. For example, a can of cola can have as much as 9 cubes of added sugar.

Even if we don't see the word 'sugar' listed in the ingredients, it's often there, but under a different name. Look for any of the following words, which indicate that sugar has been added.

- Glucose
- Sucrose
- Maltose
- Honey
- Molasses
- Maple syrup
- Glucose syrup
- Hydrolysed starch
- Corn syrup
- Agave nectar
- Coconut palm sugar
- Treacle

Sugars also occur naturally in foods such as fresh fruit and milk, but we don't need to cut down on these types of sugars.

For a healthy, balanced diet, cut down on foods and drinks containing added sugars. These tips can help you to cut down.

Instead of sugary fizzy drinks or sugary squash, go for water, lower-fat milks, or sugar-free, diet and no added sugar drinks. Remember that even unsweetened fruit juice is sugary, so limit the amount you have to no more than 150ml a day.

If you prefer fizzy drinks, try diluting fruit juice with sparkling water.

If you take sugar in hot drinks or add sugar to your breakfast cereal, gradually reduce the amount until you can cut it out altogether.

Rather than spreading jam, marmalade, syrup, treacle or honey on your toast, try a lower-fat spread, sliced banana or lower-fat cream cheese instead.

Check nutrition labels to help you pick the foods with less added sugar, or go for the lower-sugar version.

Try halving the sugar you use in your recipes – it works for most things except jam, meringues and ice cream.

Choose tins of fruit in juice rather than syrup.

Choose wholegrain breakfast cereals, but not those coated with sugar or honey.

Nutrition labels often tell you how much total sugar a food contains, but they don't tell you the amount of "free sugars". You can compare labels and choose foods that are lower in total sugar.

Look for the "Carbohydrates (of which sugars)" figure in the nutrition label.

- high – over 22.5g of total sugars per 100g

- low – 5g of total sugars or less per 100g

If the amount of sugars per 100g is between these figures, that is regarded as a medium level

This includes labels that use red, amber and green colour-coding and advice on reference intakes (RI) of some nutrients, which can include sugar.

Labels that include colour-coding allow you to see at a glance if the food is high, medium or low in sugars.

Red = high

Amber = medium

Green = low

Look at how many teaspoons of sugar are in these products:

330ml bottle of pure orange juice = 7

500g jar of pasta sauce = 8

2 scoops of low-fat ice cream = 3

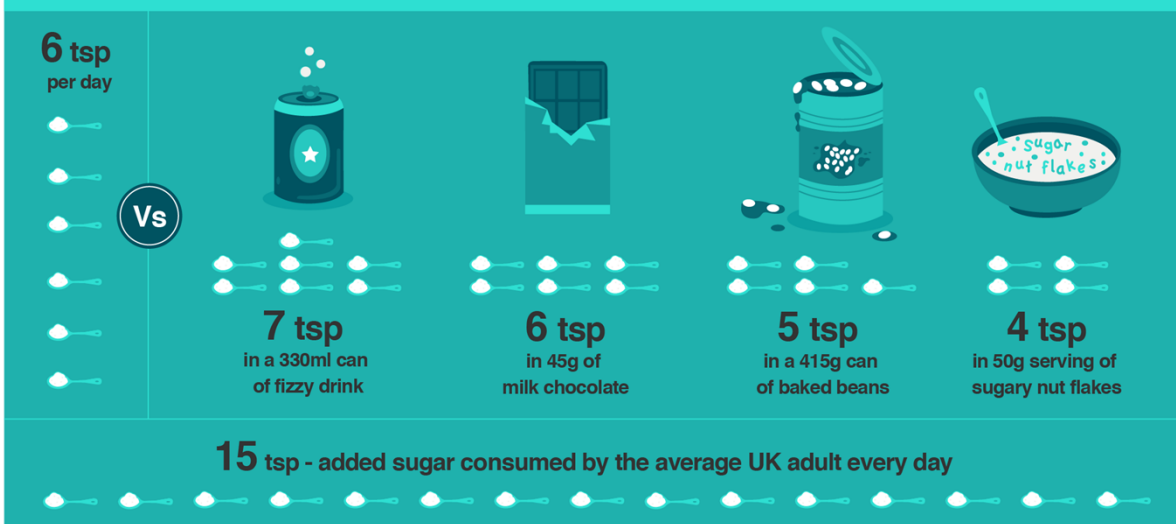
500ml flavoured mineral water = 6

Coffee shop standard hot chocolate and cream = 10

Skinny blueberry muffin = 6

# SUGAR BY NUMBERS

The World Health Organisation recommends we aim to consume no more than 6 tsp of free sugar per day



## Sugar swaps

Beat cravings with fat and protein

Swap sugary drinks for fizzy water

Try sugar substitutes

Look out for hidden sugars

## References

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/ztfpn39>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/sugars.aspx>

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Enjoy-food/Carbohydrates-and-diabetes/how-to-cut-down-on-sugar/>