

# KICK THE SUGAR HABIT



**YOUR CHALLENGE:** Replace sugar, refined flour, and processed foods with whole foods. Report the completion of your goal at [www.dmba.com](http://www.dmba.com) with a simple “yes” or “no.”

## IT'S HIDING

In the days of the American pioneers, table sugar was used sparingly. Refined sugar wasn't readily available or wasn't affordable. In the 19th century, an average American consumed an estimated 12 pounds of sugar each year. Today, that amount has climbed to 103 pounds a year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

You're probably reviewing the last 12 months and thinking, “There's no way I ate that much sugar!” Possibly. But the 103-pound figure includes more than table sugar. Sugar has many names:

- Sucrose (white sugar)
- Fructose (fruit sugar)
- Lactose (milk sugar)
- Dextrose (corn sugar)

- Maltose (malt sugar)
- Invert sugar (a mix of glucose and fructose)
- Brown sugar
- Corn syrup
- Honey
- Maple sugar
- Raw sugar

These are all common forms of sugar and have similar effects on your body and your health.

## SEE SUGAR FOR WHAT IT IS

You expect candy bars to be full of sugar. But there's also sugar in ketchup, canned vegetables, fruit snacks, juice, fat-free foods, and more. Read food labels. When you see any of these sugars listed as the first or second ingredient, you know that food is high in sugar.

Some ready-to-eat breakfast cereals have sugar listed first on the ingredient list. This means there are more calories from sugar than there are from grains.

Other foods that are rapidly absorbed and contribute to high blood sugar and high insulin levels include white potatoes, white rice, white bread (and pancakes, waffles, or pastry made from white flour), soft drinks and sugar-sweetened drinks, snack foods (made largely from white flour and sugar), and refined and sweetened breakfast cereals.

All of these foods are said to have a “high glycemic index.” All high-glycemic index (GI) foods contribute to the risk of developing obesity and diabetes.

## TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Nearly everyone enjoys sweet treats and sugary drinks to varying degrees. It's OK to eat sweet foods. Fruits, berries, and sweet potatoes, for example, are delightfully sweet.

The problem isn't necessarily the sugar, either; it's that sugars often crowd out more nutritious foods, like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and

healthy proteins. Sugars contain “empty calories”—they have lots of calories but provide few, if any, nutrients.

It works like this:

1. You feel hungry, so you grab a quick snack—like a candy bar or a bag of chips.
2. Sugars (either the actual sugar or the sugar found in high GI foods) are rapidly absorbed by your body, causing your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels to rise quickly.
3. To combat elevated glucose levels, your body produces a high amount of insulin. Your blood sugar levels drop rapidly, and you feel hungry all over again.
4. In response to the rapid drop in blood sugar, your body begins to store an extra supply of calories for future energy needs. It doesn't want to starve, after all.

When excessive, the stored energy is turned into fat and contributes to obesity. So, all you gained from eating the high-sugar foods was a short burst of energy—and a little more fat.

## WHERE'S THE GOOD STUFF?

Nutritious foods, like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy proteins, are packed full of vitamins and minerals and are generally low in calories.



The naturally occurring sugars in these foods are absorbed more slowly, so they provide a more even energy supply. They also help you feel full longer.

Sweets, such as tempting desserts, encourage overeating—even if you're not hungry. When was the last time you over-ate broccoli or carrots? They're not nearly as tempting (or high in calories) as ice cream, cake, or as a cinnamon roll.

## LESS IS BETTER

Eating a lot of sugars contributes to excess weight, high blood triglycerides, and high blood sugar and is a factor in diabetes.

High intake of sugars is linked to an increased risk of tooth decay, too. Excess sugars might also increase the risk for osteoporosis, particularly among girls who consume soft drinks in place of milk.

Soft drinks may also significantly increase the risk of gout and cancer of the pancreas.

## HOW MUCH SUGAR IS OK?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends limiting added sugars in the diet to about 25g per day. That's less than the amount in one soft drink!

In other words, most Americans eat far too much sugar and should limit soft drinks and other sweets.

You don't need any added sugar. The best sweets are fresh fruits, such as berries, melons, peaches, cherries, pineapple, oranges, apples, and bananas.

The sugar found in fresh fruits is absorbed more slowly and doesn't cause the rapid increase in blood sugar. They taste great, too!

Remember that the biggest problem regarding sugar consumption is that it takes the place of nutrient-rich foods that keep us healthy. It's important to eat a healthy, balanced diet and eat sugar in moderation.

So try these suggestions to help you eat fewer sugars:

- Eat a pear, peach, apple, or other sweet fruit to satisfy a sugar craving.

- Have a fresh fruit salad
- Reserve high-calorie desserts for special occasions, and eat them in moderate amounts.
- Choose desserts that are better for you, such as frozen yogurt topped with fruits and nuts.
- Dentists recommend that if you eat sweets, eat them at mealtime, not between meals, and brush afterward.
- Buy whole-grain unsweetened cereal for breakfast. If you need a sweeter taste, add berries.

## WANT MORE INFORMATION?

- American Heart Association <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living>
- WebMD <https://www.webmd.com/living-healthy>
- CDC Healthy Living <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyliving/index.html>

*Note: If you can't complete this challenge because of a medical condition, let us know and we'll come up with an alternative for you.*

