Common Questions About Sugar in the Diet

Life is sweet. Keep it balanced.

How much sugar can I have in a healthy diet?

Sugar plays a role in healthy, balanced diets by adding flavor and function that help people enjoy a wide variety of foods. Because of this, the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recommend that healthy dietary patterns can include up to 50 grams or 12 teaspoons of added sugars per day.[1]

How can I tell how much added sugars are in my food?

Added sugars are easy to find on Nutrition Facts labels. They are listed under Total Sugars, where you'll find the grams of added sugars per serving in the product and the percent daily value or how much that product contributes to the total recommended intake for a day. For example, a product with 7.5 grams of added sugars per serving represents 15% of the total 50-gram daily value for one day.

Why are sugars added to foods that don't even need to be sweet?

Sugar has many functional properties that range from balancing acidity or adding bulk to preventing spoilage. For example, in whole-grain, fiber-rich bread, sugar balances bitter flavors, contributes to the texture, feeds the yeast to help the bread rise, aids in browning, helps with moisture retention and increases shelf-life.

What does a diet with 10% of calories from added sugars look like?

The 10% target for added sugars intake provided by the DGA applies throughout the day or week, not as a limit to be applied to individual products.

Here is one example (based on a 2,000-calorie diet):

BREAKFAST	LUNCH	SNACK	DINNER	DESSERT
0 grams added sugars — Coffee, milk or juice (no added sugar)	**6** grams added sugars — Turkey sandwich on whole-grain bread	**0** grams added sugars — Mixed nuts	**3** grams added sugars — Spaghetti and meatballs (½ cup of sauce)	Chocolate chip cookie
8 grams added sugars — Oatmeal (2 teaspoons of brown sugar)	**0** grams added sugars — Fresh fruit and raw vegetables	**9** grams added sugars — Yogurt (5.3 ounces)	**3** grams added sugars — Salad with dressing (2 tablespoons)	**15** grams added sugars

Are reduced-sugar or sugar-free options better for you?

When sugar is removed from a food, new ingredients (usually more than one) must be added to replace both the flavor and functionality of sugar. These ingredients often have the same amount of or even more calories than sugar. So, you should not assume less sugar means fewer calories.

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at DietaryGuidelines.gov.

the Sugar association   Real Sugar