



Sugar

It is now recommended that our intake of free sugars should not exceed 5% of total energy intake each day. But there is lots of confusion around this, with many of us not knowing how much this is and how to reduce our consumption.

In this article, we answer some common questions to help reduce the question mark surrounding sugar intake.

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The Paper Industry Technical Association (PITA) is an independent organisation which operates for the general benefit of its members – both individual and corporate – dedicated to promoting and improving the technical and scientific knowledge of those working in the UK pulp and paper industry. Formed in 1960, it serves the Industry, both manufacturers and suppliers, by providing a forum for members to meet and network; it organises visits, conferences and training seminars that cover all aspects of papermaking science. It also publishes the prestigious journal *Paper Technology International* and the *PITA Annual Review*, both sent free to members, and a range of other technical publications which include conference proceedings and the acclaimed *Essential Guide to Aqueous Coating*.



What are free sugars?

Many people think of sugar as something they add to their recipes or drinks in the form of table sugar. However, free sugars are all sugars added to food and drink including those in food production. This includes everything from crisps, biscuits, cakes, soft drinks, ready meals and sauces. These sugars should be consumed less often and in small amounts.

What are natural sugars?

Sugar in dairy foods such as milk and yoghurt, fruit and vegetables in all forms, i.e. canned, frozen, fresh and dried, all contain natural sugars and don't count towards your free sugar intake. These foods form an important percentage of a healthy and balanced diet.

Why should I reduce my free sugar intake?

Having a higher intake of free sugars means you will likely be consuming more calories overall, which is likely to lead to weight gain and eventually obesity. You are also at higher risk of developing tooth decay and type 2 diabetes.

Why do fruit and vegetables contain natural sugars but fruit and vegetable juices and smoothies contain free sugars?

The UK government have separated these two types of sugars. Whole fruits and vegetables contain sugars that remain inside their cells, whereas juices, smoothies, purees and pastes contain sugars that are released from their cell structure during production. It has been suggested that sugars that have been released from their cell structure are more easily consumed in greater quantities. For example, you would likely be able to drink a whole smoothie much more quickly and easily than you would consume the equal quantity in whole fruit and vegetables that it took to make it. This could lead to overconsumption in calories and sugar. Therefore, it is recommended not to consume more than 150ml of fruit and vegetable smoothies each day, with this counting at one of your 5-A-Day.

Which foods contain the most free sugars?

The main sources are both foods and drinks that contain added sugar. This includes soft drinks, cakes, biscuits, sweets and desserts.

How do you know how much free sugar is in the foods I buy?

By law, packaging must include the total sugars on their nutrition label. Total sugars are a combination of free sugars and naturally occurring sugars.

Working out the free sugar quantity is tricky due to that fact that we are given the total sugar value. Looking at the ingredients is helpful as sugars added to the product must be included on the list. Free sugar can appear on the ingredients list as 'sugar, honey, brown sugar, maple syrup, molasses, treacle, nectars, maltose, corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, isoglucose and crystalline sucrose'. Ingredients are listed in descending order of weight; the lower down the list the added sugar comes, the less that has been added. If there is no sign of any, all the better.

Are there lots of hidden sugars in the foods I buy?

Savoury convenience foods can have sugar added to them, such as sauces condiments, ready meals and soups. The government has implemented a strategy to reduce calories of such foods by 20% by 2024, resulting in a reduced level of added sugar. However, sugar isn't 'hidden' in food, by law everything contained within the food product must be displayed within the ingredients. Take a few seconds to check over the ingredients list before purchasing.

How can I decrease my free sugar intake?

Eating a diet of whole foods with limited processed products will enable you to significantly reduce your sugar intake. Eat a diet of fibre-rich starchy carbohydrates, fresh fruit and vegetables, foods high in protein such as lean meat, fish, eggs and low-fat dairy products. Swap sugar laden drinks with unsweetened alternatives such as water, low-fat milk, no added sugar squash and fruit teas. Bear in mind that alcoholic drinks currently contribute to around 10% of adults' free sugar intakes. Therefore decrease your intake by alternating between alcoholic beverages and glasses of water.

How to go sugar free with the family

Things are usually easier to stick with if there are others around you going through the same experience. We also often worry about the health of our family, and want to instil the healthiest lifestyle choices upon them where possible.



Both of the above points make a great argument for cutting down on sugar as a family. Getting through the cravings together will help to strengthen willpower and resilience, seeing you through to the other side, where sugar isn't all that powerful and divisive!

The World Health Organization warn that we shouldn't be consuming more than 5% of our daily calories from added sugars, yet according to statistics from the National Diet & Nutrition Survey, adults aged 19-64 are consuming on average 12.1% of their daily calorie intake from added sugars.

Cutting down your sugar intake will not only decrease your risk of developing a vast range of chronic disease, but it will also leave you with greater energy, increased performance, reduced hunger and decreased cravings. So how can you do this in a way that will work for the whole family?

1. Don't reward with sugary treats

This is something that most of us have probably experienced as a child, be it from a parent or grandparent. Occasional treats will do little damage, but instigating regular sweet treats will reinforce a link between achievement and sugar. Instead, arrange a day out or experience for whole family to enjoy together.

2. Aim to eat from scratch

It's almost impossible to estimate the amount of sugar you are consuming if you eat food from packets. Sugar can be camouflaged using a range of terms such as glucose, sucrose, maltose and fructose – just to name a few! Aim to make food from scratch wherever possible.

3. Short cut dinner time

It is no secret that there are just not enough hours in the day. We all do our best to make evening meals from scratch but occasionally buckle under the pressure of time constraints and opt for something a little less healthy. But a healthy and balanced meal needn't take hours, there is nothing wrong with using pre-chopped vegetables, or boiling frozen veg. A healthy and delicious stir fry can be made using pre-bagged stir fry vegetables and frozen prawns with a splash of soy sauce, this would only take a matter of minutes and not a takeaway menu in sight!

4. Producing for the masses

No one understands the importance of cooking in large quantities than someone who has many mouths to feed. Cooking large batches of meals such as bolognaise, stews and curries. Split all of the leftovers into portions sizes before popping in the freezer for whenever you need them. Once again, this will stop the temptation of any unhealthy convenience foods making an appearance when a frozen home-cooked meal is one simple defrost away.

5. Be cautious of fruit juices

Only one cup (150ml) of fruit juice counts towards 1 of your 5-A-Day. Any more than this quantity will not count and simply contribute excessively to your sugar intake. Try to stick to squash with no added sugar or fruit flavoured water. You could also make your fruit juice stretch a little further by watering it down with some fizzy water.

6. Keep snacks handy

Becoming hungry in between meals calls for a snack that will give you the boost you need and sustain your energy levels until the next meal. Crisps, chocolate and cake will see a spike in blood sugar and a surge of energy, followed briskly by a swift plummet in both, leaving mood and energy on the floor. Snacks without the sugar surge can be quick and require no effort such as a piece of fruit, or some vegetable sticks with hummus. Alternatively you could make things a little more tempting by creating healthy energy bars that include ingredients such as nut butters, seeds, oats and dried fruit.

7. Make breakfast count

Starting the day off well from the off will often dictate the day ahead. So make it a good one by avoiding cereals with high levels of sugar. Instead opt for a low sugar option such as, porridge topped with fresh berries and plain nuts, Greek yoghurt with fresh fruit or poached eggs with mushrooms and tomato. Filling up on protein will keep you full until lunchtime and help to keep any cravings at bay.

High sugar intake means we become accustomed to the taste, but by making some simple changes, the transition isn't as difficult as it may first appear.