



Week 7: March 14-20 Hidden Sugar

The American Heart Association estimates that Americans are using 22 teaspoons of sugar every day. Most of that added sugar comes from beverages, such as colas and sweet tea. By comparison, most women should be getting no more than six teaspoons of sugar a day, basically 100 calories. For most men, the recommended limit is nine teaspoons, or 150 calories. This sugar content includes the sweeteners and syrups that are added to foods during processing, preparation or at the table. However, these guidelines do not apply to naturally occurring sugars like those found in fruit, vegetables or dairy products.

Sugar does not offer any nutrients, only calories, and the calories are considered to be “empty calories,” resulting in the following:

- Replacement of healthy foods – By eating the high-sugar foods, people tend to omit the more nutritious foods and beverages making it difficult to get the nutrients needed for a healthy body.
- Addition of unwanted calories – An excess of calories leads to weight gain. High intake of added sugars, as opposed to naturally occurring sugars, is implicated in the rise of obesity. It's also associated with increased risks for high blood pressure, high triglyceride levels, other risk factors for heart disease and stroke, and inflammation (a marker for heart disease), according to Rachel K. Johnson, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D., in an American Heart Association report.

An average woman needs around 1800-2000 calories every day. By the time she eats the foods needed to get the proper nutrients, she has about 100 calories left; men have about 150 extra calories a day. One can of cola provides 150 calories and eight teaspoons of sugar, and the more common serving, a 20-ounce bottle, provides 240 calories and 16 teaspoons of sugar. In other words, forget having the candy bar or the package of crackers with the cola; including the candy with the cola totals about 400 or 500 extra calories. **It only takes 500 extra calories a day for one week to gain one pound.**

Scale Back Alabama recommends meals rich in fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, high-fiber whole grains, lean meat, poultry and fish. Here are some ways you can reduce the intake of empty calories:

- Choose water, diet- or low-calorie beverages instead of sugar-sweetened beverages. Colas and sweet tea are the primary culprits of extra sugar, but don't forget about sports drinks. They have a similar amount of sugar as a regular cola. Other beverages that should be limited are fruit punches and aides. These are not fruit juice. Drinks that are labeled punches, aides, etc., are sugar water with a small amount (usually 10 percent or less) of fruit juice.

- Read the ingredients. The only way to know if the processed food contains sugar is to recognize all the names used for it. Here are the common names: brown sugar, corn syrup, dextrin, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrate, high-fructose corn syrup, galactose, glucose, honey, hydrogenated starch, invert sugar maltose, lactose, mannitol, maple syrup, molasses, polyols, raw sugar, sorghum, sucrose, sorbitol, turbinado sugar and xylitol. If any of these names are in the top five ingredients, the food contains a significant amount of sugar. Compare labels of products such as Sunny Delight or Hawaiian Punch to 100 percent juice to see the sugar listing in the ingredients.
- For a quick, easy and inexpensive thirst-quencher, carry a water bottle and refill it throughout the day.
- Limit your alcoholic beverage intake. Alcoholic drinks can have several calories. Cut or limit your alcohol calories by drinking more water or adding a non-calorie beverage to dilute the alcohol.

The following are a few simple tips to help you reduce sugar intake. Try to incorporate these ideas into your everyday routine.

Cut out sugar slowly.

Some people may be successful at going cold turkey and giving up sugar. For others, the sugar cravings may lead to a binge on sweets. The more sugar eaten, the more cravings are likely. Therefore, slowly cutting down your sugar intake is the best way to control a sweet tooth.

- If two colas per day are normal, drop to one a day. Then next week, have one every other day. The following week, have one every three days, and so forth until you're down to just one a week.
- If sweet tea is the beverage, start with three-fourths sweet tea and one-fourth unsweetened tea for the first week. The second week the tea combination is one-half sweet tea and one-half unsweetened tea. The third week you should consume one-fourth sweet tea and three-fourths unsweetened tea. By the fourth week you are drinking unsweetened tea.
- Coffee can be a hidden-sugar beverage as well. If a cup of coffee has 2 teaspoons of sugar, use the same routine.

Have a sugar "quota."

If you must have sugar in something (coffee perhaps), use it sparingly. In other words, use sugar on foods where it matters most. Don't waste it on dressings, spreads, breakfast cereals and soda. Not only will this reduce your sugar intake in a day, but it will help you lose your sweet tooth. Sugar is incredibly addictive. The more you eat, the more it takes to satisfy you. The opposite is also true: Train your taste buds to become accustomed to less sugar, and you'll be satisfied with less sugar.

Establish guidelines about dessert.

Decide to eat dessert with only one meal, perhaps lunch but not supper. Gradually decrease to having desserts on odd days of the month, and then to weekends. Replace a sugar sweet with a raw fruit which will give you the sweet taste, but provide nutrients with fewer calories.

Keep temptations out of the house.

If high-sugar foods are not readily available, you will be less likely to eat them. If you love ice cream, a half gallon in the freezer is a temptation. Therefore, it's best not to keep ice cream at home. It should be considered a treat worth traveling for.