



The Truth About Sugar

How to curb your sweet tooth and improve your health.

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Why Talk About Sugar?

- Sugar is hidden in most of our foods
- Average American consumes **17 teaspoons/day**
- Contributes to weight gain, fatigue, and cravings
- Long-term health effects: diabetes, heart disease, inflammation



What is Sugar?

- **Natural Sugars:** Found in fruits (fructose), dairy (lactose)
- **Added Sugars:** Table sugar (sucrose), high-fructose corn syrup, syrups
- **Refined vs. Unrefined:** Whole food sugars vs. processed sugars
- Recommended daily limit: 25g for women (6 teaspoons), 36g for men (9 teaspoons).





The Impact of Sugar on the Body

- **Blood Sugar Spikes & Crashes** → Low energy & irritability
- **Insulin Resistance** → Higher risk of Type 2 Diabetes
- **Weight Gain** → Excess stored as fat
- **Brain Impact** → Triggers dopamine, leading to cravings
- **Inflammation** → Chronic low-grade inflammation linked to disease



Where Sugar Hides

- Sugary drinks: soda, juices, energy drinks, flavored coffees
- Breakfast foods: cereals, muffins, flavored yogurts, granola
- Sauces & condiments: ketchup, BBQ sauce, salad dressings
- Packaged foods: protein bars, trail mix, “low-fat” snacks
- Restaurant meals often contain hidden sugar

Sugar & Health Risks

Obesity → Increased risk of multiple chronic diseases

Type 2 Diabetes → From insulin resistance

Heart Disease → Sugar increases triglycerides & bad cholesterol

Liver Health → Excess sugar → fatty liver disease

Dental Issues → Cavities, gum disease

Mental Health → Linked to mood swings, anxiety, and depression



Tips to Reduce Sugar Intake

- Choose whole foods: fruit, veggies, whole grains, healthy proteins
- Read nutrition labels (watch for hidden sugars like dextrose, maltose)
- Cut back on sweetened beverages
- Cook more meals at home
- Pair carbs with protein & fiber to balance blood sugar
- Gradually reduce sugar to reset taste buds

Healthier Alternatives

- Fruit: nature's candy, rich in fiber and antioxidants
- Dark Chocolate (70%+): a small square can satisfy cravings
- Natural Sweeteners (in moderation): honey, maple syrup, dates
- Experiment with spices: cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla extract



Sugar Substitutes



Monk fruit

- Monk fruit sweetener is extracted from the monk fruit, a small round fruit native to China.
- The sweetness comes from mogrosides, a natural compound that are 150-250 x sweeter than sugar.
- Sold as a powder or liquid, often blended with other ingredients like erythritol to balance taste and bulk.
- Taste: Can have a slight aftertaste, especially in high concentrations.
- Processing: Some commercial monk fruit sweeteners are mixed with fillers like dextrose or erythritol, which can add calories or affect glycemic response.
- Cooking & Baking: Works well in beverages and some baking but does not provide bulk or caramelization like sugar.

Stevia

- Stevia is a natural, zero-calorie sweetener extracted from the leaves of the Stevia rebaudiana plant.
- It's 200-300x sweeter than sugar
- Available as powder, liquid drops, or in blends with other sweeteners
- Taste: can have slightly bitter or licorice-like aftertaste
- Processing: Highly refined stevia extracts may be heavily processed thus not all stevia products are considered natural.
- Gut Health: Generally well tolerated, but very high intake could affect gut bacteria.
- Cooking & Baking: Stevia does not provide bulk or caramelization like sugar, it needs to be combined with other ingredients when baking.

Sugar Alcohols

Xylitol

- ~100% as sweet as sugar
- Found in sugar-free gum, mints, candy
- Low-calorie (2.4 kcal/g) and dental-friendly

Erythritol

- ~70% as sweet as sugar
- Used in beverages, baked goods, chocolate
- Very low calorie (0.2 kcal/g)

Sorbitol

- ~60% as sweet as sugar
- Found in sugar-free candies, chewing gum, diet foods
- Calories: 2.6 kcal/g; may have laxative effect in large amounts

- **Pros:** Low calorie, minimal blood sugar impact, tooth friendly
- **Cons:** May cause bloating, gas, diarrhea in some people, excessive consumption can have laxative effect.



Sugar Alcohols

Pros :

Lower Calorie Content

- Provide fewer calories than sugar (typically 1–3 kcal/g vs sugar at 4 kcal/g), helping with weight management.

Blood Sugar Friendly

- Partially absorbed by the body, so they have a smaller effect on blood glucose and insulin than regular sugar, making them suitable for people with diabetes.

Dental Health

- Do not promote tooth decay or cavities.

Natural Occurrence

- Many are found naturally in fruits and vegetables (xylitol, sorbitol, mannitol).

Sweetness Without Sugar

- Can provide a sweet taste without adding full sugar, useful in sugar-free foods, gum, and candy.

Cons:

Digestive Issues

- Can cause gas, bloating, or diarrhea when consumed in large amounts because they are only partially absorbed in the intestine. some (like sorbitol, maltitol, mannitol) are more likely to have this effect than others (like erythritol).

Lower Sweetness Than Sugar

- Most sugar alcohols are less sweet than sugar (except xylitol), so they may not perfectly replace sugar in all recipes.

Calorie Contribution

- Although lower in calories, they are not completely calorie-free, so overconsumption can still contribute to energy intake.

Cost and Availability

- Some sugar alcohols may be more expensive or harder to find than regular sugar.

Artificial Sweeteners



- Aspartame (Equal, NutraSweet) 200x sweeter than sugar
- Saccharin (Sweet'N Low) 300-400x sweeter than sugar
- Sucralose (Splenda) 600x sweeter than sugar

Artificial Sweeteners

Pros:

Low or Zero Calories

- Help reduce overall calorie intake, which can support weight management.

Blood Sugar Control

- Do not significantly raise blood glucose or insulin, making them useful for people with diabetes or insulin resistance.

Dental Health

- Do not promote cavities or tooth decay like sugar does.

Highly Sweet, Small Amounts Needed

- Very potent (some hundreds of times sweeter than sugar), so only tiny amounts are needed to achieve desired sweetness.

Heat-Stable Options

- Some, like sucralose and acesulfame-K, can be used in baking or cooking without losing sweetness.

Cons / Considerations:

Aftertaste

- Some artificial sweeteners (saccharin, Ace-K) can have a bitter or metallic aftertaste, which may affect taste preferences.

Possible Impact on Appetite and Cravings

- Some studies suggest they may alter appetite regulation or increase cravings for sweet foods, though evidence is mixed.

Not a Whole Food Solution

- Using artificial sweeteners does not provide the nutrients, fiber, or health benefits of whole foods like fruits.

Long-Term Effects

- Generally recognized as safe, but long-term metabolic and gut health effects are still being studied.

Mindful Eating & Habits

- Practice portion control
- Slow down & savor each bite
- Avoid distracted eating (screens, multitasking)
- Be mindful of emotional eating triggers
- Focus on progress, not perfection



Practical Strategies to Curb Cravings

- Stay hydrated: thirst often mimics sugar cravings
- Prioritize protein at each meal
- Manage stress (yoga, meditation, walking) to reduce emotional eating
- Get enough sleep → Poor sleep increases sugar cravings
- Keep healthier snacks available (nuts, fruit, yogurt)





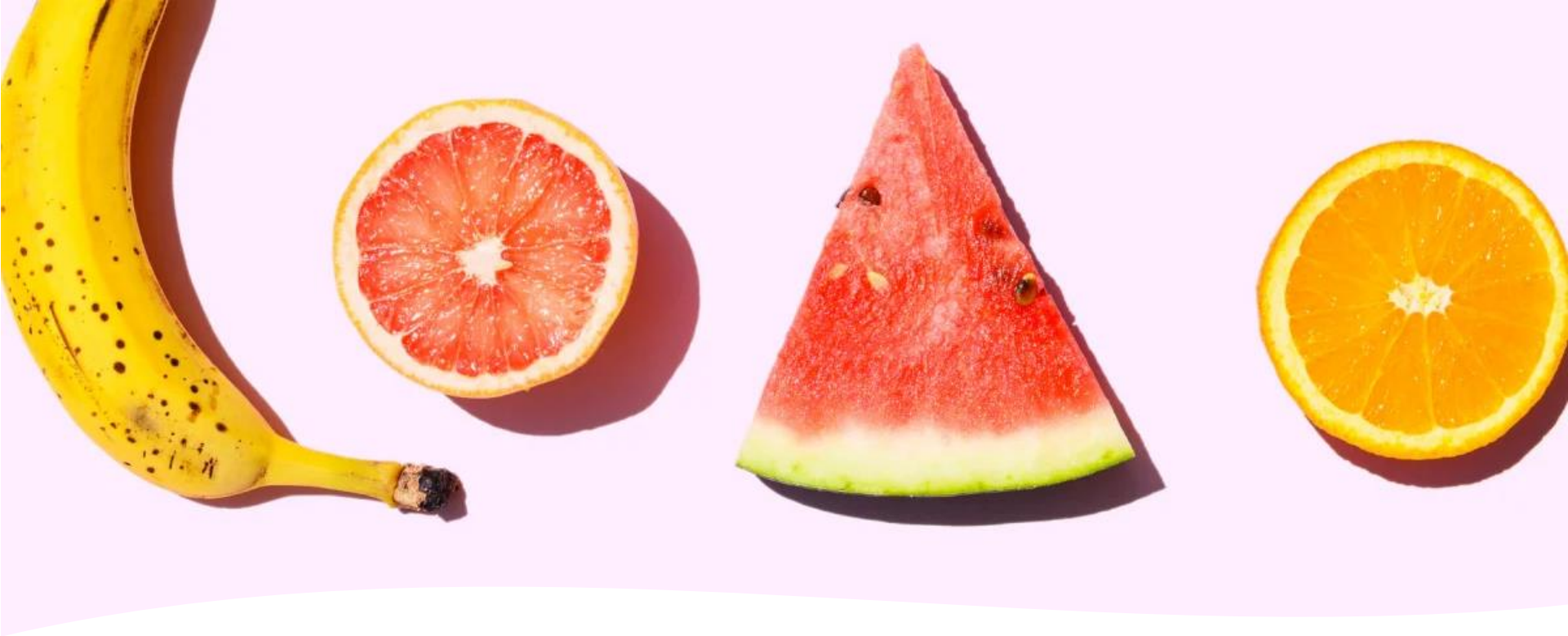
Takeaway Message

- Sugar is okay in moderation—but hidden sugars add up
- Knowledge = power: read labels, make mindful swaps
- Small, consistent changes lead to long-term health benefits
- You can enjoy sweetness *without sacrificing your health*



Food for Thought

- Can you think of hidden sugars in your daily meals?
- How do you handle sugar cravings during stressful or emotional times?
- What swaps or alternatives could you realistically incorporate into your routine?
- How has your energy or mood been affected by sugar intake?
- What challenges do you face in reducing sugar, and how could you overcome them?



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