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NUTRITION SEGMENT MARCH 3, 2008: SWEET STUFF ON SUGAR



CELEBRATE NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

National Nutrition Month® is a nutrition education and information campaign created by the American Dietetic Association. The campaign is designed to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. NNM also promotes ADA and its members to the public and the media as the most valuable and credible source of timely, scientifically-based food and nutrition information

National nutrition month's theme is "It's a Matter of Fact". It is difficult to separate fact from fiction when it comes to nutrition. Part of the difficulty is that nutrition is still an early science with new information arriving daily. Another part of the challenge is the overabundance of information on the internet. Sugar is a prime example of a topic that still causes confusion.

My grandmother used to call sugar "poison". Every morning she'd say, "Do you really want that poison on the table?" The word sugar brings up various images and ideas. For some, the visions are dreamy like the board game CandyLand. For others, the visions are not so good and involve hyperactive children, cavities, and feelings of being out-of-control. It is time to talk about sweet facts regarding sugar.

WHAT IS SUGAR?

When we think of sugar we think of the white powder used in baking, which is table sugar or sucrose. However there are many sugars in nature. Sugars are carbohydrates. A carbohydrate is made of carbon (carbo), hydrogen, and oxygen (hydrate). Sugars can have long combinations of carbo, hydrogen, and oxygen, or short combinations. The short combinations are called simple sugars and include sucrose, fructose which is fruit sugar, and lactose which is milk sugar. The body easily breaks down simple sugars for energy.

SUGAR NAMES

There are two forms of sugar in foods – added sugar and natural sugars. Some of the names for added sugars that may be listed on the label ingredients list are: raw sugar, brown sugar, brown rice syrup, invert sugar, corn sweetener, malt syrup, high fructose

corn syrup, dextrose, maltose, glucose, and sucrose. Get to know the names of the added sugars above and be aware of where they appear in the ingredient list.

- Most words that end in “ose” are some form of added sugar

WHAT ARE NATURAL SUGARS?

Natural sugars are those found in plants, which are complete parts of the plant that cannot be removed. Foods with natural sugars are:

- Fresh and frozen fruits contain the natural sugar fructose
- Simple sugars from plain vegetables like carrots, broccoli, tomatoes, zucchini, spinach
- Low-fat milk like skim and 1% contain the natural sugar lactose

The difference between natural sugars and added sugars is the packaging. Fructose in fruit comes in a package with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. High fructose corn syrup in soda pop comes in a package with water and a few other unhealthy components.

- Sugars alone do not have vitamins or minerals, only calories, which is why it’s important to see what type of “package” the sugar comes in.

HOW CAN YOU TELL HOW MUCH SUGAR IS IN A FOOD?

Sugar is listed in grams on the label. Since one teaspoon of sugar is 4 grams, take the grams of sugar and divide them by four to determine teaspoons of sugar per serving listed on the label. For instance, a soda pop typically contains 40 grams of sugar per 12 ounce can. 40 divided by 4 is 10 teaspoons of sugar!

- Remember, 4 grams of sugar = 1 teaspoon

HOW CAN I TELL IF A SUGAR IS ADDED OR NATURAL?

This is difficult because the label does not separate added sugars from natural sugars. First, start by reading the ingredients on a food label. Ingredients are listed in order of abundance. If sugar is listed within the first two ingredients, know that it is abundant. Take into account the source of the food when trying to determine if all sugars listed on the label are added or not. For instance, fruit-flavored yogurt contains the natural sugar lactose, natural sugar fructose, and added sugar to help sweeten it. Since the label does not break down added sugars versus natural sugars, it is best to buy plain yogurt, or one that has the least amount of sugar grams on the label.

- Ingredients on a label occur in order of abundance

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend staying within 8 teaspoons of added sugar per day for a 2000 calorie eating plan. The World Health Organization recommends limiting added sugars to less than 10% of total daily intake, which is around 10-12 teaspoons for a 2000 calorie eating plan. Below are teaspoons per servings of common foods.

SUGAR AMOUNTS IN FOOD:

Lucky Charms cereal, 1 cup	3½ teaspoons
Ketchup, 4 T	4 teaspoons
Pancake syrup, ¼ cup	8 teaspoons
Dried fruit with added sugar, ½ cup	10 teaspoons
Snapple Lemon Iced Tea, 16 oz.	11 ½ teaspoons
McDonald's Vanilla Shake, 21 oz.	24 teaspoons

For nutrition questions, contact St Luke's Health Solutions dietitian, Stacy Beeson at 381-2403.