

Sugar: Friend or Foe? *Part I: Regular Food Intake*

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Sugar comes in many shapes and sizes, and some forms of sugar provide us with more benefits than other forms of sugar. This article focuses on sugar for regular food intake. Part II of the sugar series will focus on sports nutrition and its relationship to sugar, a completely different topic. So let's take a look at sugar and our regular food intake.

When we read food labels, we can find three main food groups which contain sugar from various sources like fruits, dairy (milk & yogurt), and sweets (table sugar, honey, syrup, etc). It is important to note where your sugars come from because the different forms of sugar affect our bodies in different ways.

Fruits and dairy products offer the body more benefits than table sugars/sweets. For example, a fruit, which contains the sugar fructose, also provides our bodies with various health benefits such as vitamins, antioxidants, and fiber. Dairy products, which contain the sugar lactose, also provide our bodies with calcium, Vitamin D, and protein. Table sugars/sweets primarily give us calories and energy but don't provide our body with additional health benefits. So ultimately, when we eat sugars from fruit and dairy sources, we are getting more than just the carbohydrate; we are receiving a multitude of health benefits.

So how do you know where the sugar comes from in the food items you buy? Read the ingredients list! The most predominant ingredients will be at the top of the ingredient list. Look for products that include milk, yogurt, or actual names of fruit.

Be cautious of the many hidden names of sugar/sweets: Corn syrup, barley malt, syrup, honey, sucrose, cane juice, agave, and sweetener, just to name a few. Consume these sugars less often since they are not adding health benefits besides calories and they do not fill you up, so may end up eating more than you need. Get your preferred sources of sugar by focusing on fruits and dairy products and keeping your table sugar/sweet sources to a minimum.

A spoonful of sugar can help the medicine go down when the sugar comes from the right sources. So keep that apple-a-day handy! Stay tuned for Part II of this two-part sugar series on Sugar & Sports Nutrition.

By Sarah Koszyk, MA, RD



Sarah Koszyk, MA, RD is a Registered Dietitian and Nutrition Coach at MV Nutrition and Eating Free where she coaches her clients to reach their successful weight goals. She was the recipient of Outstanding Dietitian of the Year Award 2011 and Recognized Dietitian of the Year Award 2011 from the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics. Contact Sarah today to set up your free consultation.