What’s the Latest on Sugar?

It might come as a surprise, but a healthy, well-balanced diet contains sugars, because monosaccharides such as fructose and glucose, and disaccharides such as sucrose and lactose, occur naturally in fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and many grains. The issue that seems to be affecting our health is the increase in added sugars over the last 30 years.

To quote from the American Heart Association’s scientific statement from August 2009:

"Increases in the intake of soft drinks, fruit drinks, desserts, sugars and jellies, candy, and ready-to-eat cereals largely account for the increased energy intake from sugars/added sugars. Soft drinks and other sugar-sweetened beverages are the primary source of added sugars in Americans’ diets. The AHA’s Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations Revision 2006 recommended minimizing the intake of beverages and food with added sugars. The present statement expands on that recommendation by proposing a specific upper limit of intake for added sugars. A prudent upper limit of intake is half of the discretionary calorie allowance that can be accommodated within the appropriate energy intake level needed for a person to achieve or maintain a healthy weight based on the US Department of Agriculture food intake patterns. (To find your “discretionary calorie allowance” go to: www.mypyramid.gov).... In conclusion, to achieve and maintain healthy weights and decrease cardiovascular risk while at the same time meeting essential nutrient needs, the AHA encourages people to consume an overall healthy diet that is consistent with the AHA’s 2006 diet and lifestyle recommendations. Most American women should eat or drink no more than 100 calories per day from added sugars, and most American men should eat or drink no more than 150 calories per day from added sugars. For reference, one 12-ounce can of cola contains 8 teaspoons of added sugar, for 130 calories."


An overall healthy diet consists of a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein foods, such as recommended by www.MyPyramid.gov, with limited amounts of foods that contain added sugars. Added sugars would include table sugar, high fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, maple syrup, molasses, powdered sugar, agave nectar, honey, raw sugar, evaporated cane juice, brown rice syrup, and brown sugar.

Here is a measurable goal to follow:
For men, keep your added sugar <150 calories (9 ½ teaspoons or 38 grams) a day
For women, keep your added sugar <100 calories (6 ½ teaspoons or 25 grams) a day

According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest Nutrition Action newsletter for January/February 2010, here are additional reasons to cut back on the amount of added sugars we consume:

1. Added sugars add calories without other nutrients, and this can lead to unwanted weight gain. Alcoholic beverage calories should also be considered as a part of the discretionary calorie allowance as they, too, are a source of calories without other nutrients.
2. Cut back on sugar sweetened beverages. In 1965 Americans consumed ~12% of calories from beverages, but in 2001 we increased that to ~21% (Circulation 120:1011, 2009). Americans consume on average 22-30 teaspoons of sugar a day, which equals 350 to 475 extra calories, and sweetened drinks provide calories without any other nutrient benefits.
4. Fructose, a monosaccharide (table sugar and high fructose corn syrup are both ~ half glucose and ~half...

5. Researchers followed 91,000 women for 8 years; those who drank at least 1 sweetened soft drink a day had a 40% higher risk of type 2 diabetes than those who drank <1 a month, when weight was not a factor. When overweight/obesity was factored in, those women who drank 1 sweetened soft drink a day had an 83% higher risk for type 2 diabetes (JAMA 292:927, 2004).

6. For those people with high blood pressure, the recommended diet of eating a lot of beans, nuts and seeds, fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy, leaves little room for added sugars.

In the current issue of Pediatrics, it revealed how many movies use “product placement” of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods and beverages, which may influence children’s food choices:

“Prevalence of Food and Beverage Brands in Movies: 1996–2005” A total of 1180 brand placements were identified and verified, including 427 food, 425 beverage, and 328 food retail establishment brand placements. Candy/confections (26%) and salty snacks (21%) were the most prevalent food brands, sugar-sweetened beverages (76%) were the most prevalent beverage brands, and fast food composed two thirds of the food retail establishment brand placements. CONCLUSIONS Food, beverage, and food retail establishment brands are frequently portrayed in movies, and most of the brand placements are for energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods or product lines. Movies are a potent source of advertising to children, which has been largely overlooked. PEDIATRICS Vol. 125 No. 3 March 2010, pp. 468-474.

So what’s the bottom line? It’s up to every individual to make the daily choices of what to eat or drink, and find ways to make the choices enjoyable. If sweetened sodas and beverages are an issue, try what Carla, a UA employee, does. She dislikes plain water, so she adds a sugar-free packet of Hawaiian Punch to her water bottle. Others add a lemon or lime slice, while others prefer an unsweetened herbal tea or diet soda. And don’t be concerned about the naturally occurring sugars in vegetables, fruit, grains or dairy – they are not the problem!

If you would like more information on the subject of sugar, sweeteners, or other nutrition information, feel free to call me (621-4601) or Jodi (62604760). We look forward to hearing from you!

Nancy

Nancy Rogers, MS, RD
Coordinator, Worksite Wellness and Health Promotion
UA Life & Work Connections
University of Arizona
520-621-4601
rogersn@email.arizona.edu