

## Sugar

This Food Fact Sheet will help you to understand about different types of sugar, which foods it is found in and how to make sure you are eating the right amount.

### What is sugar?

Sugar, like starch, is a carbohydrate. There are many different types of, and names for sugar. For example, sucrose or 'table sugar' is added to drinks, baked goods and confectionery. Fructose is naturally found in fruit and honey and lactose is naturally present in milk.

Glucose is one of the simplest forms of sugar and is the basic building block of starch. Starch is the main form of carbohydrate found in bread, pasta, potatoes, rice, pulses, whole grains and cereals. Glucose is also the type of sugar that circulates in the blood, often referred to as 'blood sugar' or 'blood glucose', and provides the body with energy.

### Is sugar bad for you?

No. It is the amount and how frequently you eat sugar that matters. Carbohydrates are the body's main energy source and sugar is an important source of carbohydrates. Sugar also has an important role in providing flavour and texture to foods. As sugar contains calories (kcal), but few nutrients, eating too much sugar and foods and drinks rich in added sugars, instead of other foods, may make your diet less nutritious.

### Can sugar cause health problems?

The only health problem directly linked to sugar is tooth decay. Bacteria in the mouth use sugars to produce tooth-damaging acid. The risk of tooth decay increases when sugars are eaten frequently, especially sugars that have been added to foods. To help look after teeth it is best to keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes and to brush your teeth regularly.

#### Common names for sugars added to foods

Glucose	Fructose	Sucrose
	Maltose	
Syrups (e.g. glucose, fructose, corn and maple)		
	Dextrose	Honey
Invert sugar	Molasses	Treacle

### Does sugar make you fat?

Weight gain occurs when we eat more calories than we burn. Sugary foods and drinks can only make us gain weight if overall we eat more calories than we use for energy.

One level teaspoon of sugar (4g) contains 16 calories and as sugary foods (e.g. chocolate, cakes and biscuits) and drinks can taste great and can be rich in calories, it is easy to eat too many calories from sugary products.

Some research suggests that sugary drinks make it harder for us to regulate the overall amount of calories eaten and a regular intake may be a factor contributing to obesity in children.



### Does eating too much sugar cause diabetes?

No. Diabetes is caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. However, being overweight increases

the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. People with a family history of diabetes are advised to enjoy a healthy diet and regular exercise to control their weight.

Sugary food	Alternative to try
Sweet biscuits, cakes, confectionery	Fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, malt loaf, plain biscuits, fruit bun, wholemeal scone
Sweet puddings	Baked apple, summer pudding, yoghurt or fromage frais with puréed fruit
Canned fruit in syrup	Canned fruit in juice
Sugary drinks	Pure juice diluted with still/fizzy water, diet fizzy drinks, milk, fruit smoothies, no added sugar squash, water

## Are low-calorie sweeteners bad for you?

There is no evidence to suggest that low-calorie sweeteners, such as saccharin, aspartame and sucralose, are bad for you. All ingredients added to foods undergo rigorous safety testing before being approved safe for human consumption. Low-calorie sweeteners provide a sweet taste to food but little or no calories and they are often used in products such as diet soft drinks, sugar-free chewing gum and confectionery and yoghurts.

People with the genetic condition phenylketonuria (PKU), need to restrict their intake of phenylalanine which is found naturally in many foods and as part of the sweetener aspartame.

## How much sugar is OK?

A moderate amount of sugar can be eaten as part of a healthy balanced diet. The maximum recommended daily intake of added sugars (excluding lactose) is 10% of total calories (kcal) which is approximately 50 grams per day for a 2,000 calorie (kcal) diet. This includes honey, table sugar and sugars in fruit juices and processed foods.

Portion size is also important. For example, while jam is high in sugar, you only use a small amount on your toast, whereas a 500ml bottle of regular cola can provide 54 grams or 13 teaspoons of sugar which is approximately 200 calories (kcal).

## Is sugar addictive?

There is no evidence to indicate that sugar is

addictive in humans. Sugar helps to make food taste good and like many enjoyable things, it can stimulate the brain's pleasure centre to release 'feel-good' chemicals called endorphins.

## Labelling

Many food labels provide information on the amount of sugar in foods but do not distinguish between total sugars and added sugars. The nearer the sugar is to the start of the ingredients list, the greater the amount in the product. Traffic-light labelling on some food and drink packaging provides a quick guide to the level of fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar in foods and drinks. A red light for sugar means a high sugar content, an amber light means it has medium sugar content and a green light means it is low in sugar. Also look for the 'carbohydrates (of which sugars)' figure in the nutrition information panel on the label. A high sugar content is more than 15g sugars per 100g and a low content is 5g sugars or less per 100g. Values in between indicate a medium amount of sugar.

## Summary

There are many different types of sugar, and it is the amount and how frequently you eat sugar that matters. Eating too much of any food (calories) can cause weight gain. Check labels for sugar contents, watch your portion sizes and try alternatives where possible.

**Further information:** Food Fact Sheets on relevant topics including Labelling are available at [www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts)