

Sugar! (What You Need to Know)



The majority of Americans have a very healthy sweet tooth. Between 1970 and 2005, consumption of added sugars increased by 19 percent. It's not that sugar is bad for you, it's the over-consumption of it that's the problem. The American Heart Association recommends limiting the amount of added sugars in your diet — women should get no more than 100 calories per day from sugar (about six teaspoons of sugar) and men should get no more than 150 calories per day from sugar (about nine teaspoons).

If you're looking for calorie-free alternatives, there are plenty to choose from. Artificial sweeteners are essentially calorie-free and at least 30 times sweeter than table sugar. There are currently five alternative sweeteners approved for use in the United States: saccharin, acesulfame-K, sucralose, aspartame and neotame. Cyclamates were considered safe for use at one time in this country, but were banned in the 1970s.

"It's important to look for sugar in the labels of the foods you buy," says Karin Hosenfeld, a registered dietitian in Texas. "If a food contains sugar or a simple carbohydrate derivative such as cane juice or high fructose corn syrup as one of the top three ingredients, and has no other redeeming nutritional value, then it's not a healthy choice."

Watch for words ending in "-ose," such as lactose or maltose; those are simply chemical names for sugar. Molasses or raw sugar still has four calories per gram, like any other sugar. In addition to making foods sweeter, sugar is used to maintain color, texture and flavor.

Sugar occurs naturally in foods — lactose in milk and fructose in fruit, for instance. These natural sugars are less alarming because they're accompanied by nutrients. But nutrition labels don't distinguish between natural and added sugars, which are those used during processing.

Here are some of the unexpected places it pops up, with some specific product examples:

1. **Breads and crackers.** Sugar can help smooth and balance the flavor. Adding sugar to bread is one way of ensuring it rises properly before baking.
2. **Tomato-based products.** Sugar is used to give tomatoes the optimal sugar-acid balance and improve flavor if they're picked before they ripen. Tomatoes naturally have about five grams of sugar. Anything over that is likely added.
3. **Shelf-stable meals, canned soups and frozen dinners.** Virtually any packaged meal will have added sugar to help improve taste. Look for meals with less than five grams of added sugar.



Tips and Tricks for Controlling Your Sugar Consumption:

When you're cooking, use $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup of sugar for each cup that is called for in a recipe. Try using spices and herbs such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and ginger to enhance the flavor of foods. Use dried or fresh fruit or frozen fruit juice concentrates to sweeten cereals and baked goods instead of table sugar.

Take your time at the grocery store. Read labels not only to reveal hidden sugar, but to also gain information on the overall nutritional value of foods. Buy fresh fruits or fruit packed in water and lessen your consumption of foods high in sugar such as cookies, candies, soft drinks, and prepared baked goods. Be aware — don't replace foods high in sugar with foods high in fat and sodium.

Keep healthy snacks on hand like unsweetened, low fat yogurt flavored with nutmeg, cinnamon or fresh fruit. Try popcorn, raw vegetables or low fat cheese instead of cookies and candy.

By learning to enjoy foods that are naturally sweet, you'll cut down on your sugar intake and cut calories!

Less Stress = Less Multitasking

Multitasking is something almost everyone does. It's hard *not* to multitask, given all the things we have to do and all the streams of information coming at us nonstop. But our brains just aren't equipped for handling multiple tasks that require actual thinking. Our short-term memories can only store between five and nine things at one time.

Many people find it hard to focus on just one thing, but it's a skill you can develop. Try these suggestions for improving your focus:

Screen out distractions. Start by turning off the TV, putting down your phone and logging out of your email accounts. Not convinced it'll help? Try this experiment: eliminate noncritical screen time for two days and see how much more you get done.

Plan for peaks and valleys. Are you a morning person? Then don't squander that time on email. Instead use it to tackle projects that require your full concentration. Low energy in the afternoon? That's the time to go through your inbox or catch up on your filing.

Put it out of your mind. Too many mental notes make for a cluttered mind. All that unfinished business saps your mental energy, so dump it. Put whatever's on your mind on paper or capture it digitally. Think of it as offsite storage.

Train your brain. Any skill worth having requires practice. Learning to focus is no different. Invest time in mastering attention training or meditation — both are great ways to practice taming distractions and improving focus.

What's the payoff? You'll not only get more done but also enjoy more flow — when you're so absorbed in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. Flow creates a sense of fulfillment, engagement and, yes, even contentment.



Good for You Beef Stew

The key to making this comfort food better for you is using more vegetables and less meat. It's still hearty and rich but also packed with fiber, vitamin A and beta carotene. Make this on the weekend and enjoy it through the week.

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds beef chuck roast, cubed
Salt and pepper
2 teaspoons vegetable oil
2 medium onions, chopped
3 celery stalks, sliced
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon tomato paste
2 tablespoons flour
5 cups canned low-salt beef broth
2 teaspoons dried thyme
1 bay leaf
2 rutabagas, peeled and cubed
3 carrots, diced
3 parsnips, peeled, diced
1 cup frozen peas
(Makes six servings)

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.

Sprinkle the beef with salt and pepper. Heat one teaspoon oil in a heavy, large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add beef to the pot. Cook without stirring until beef is dark brown and easy to release from the pan. Then stir and continue cooking until all sides are seared, about 8 to 10 minutes total.

Using a slotted spoon, transfer meat to a plate.

Reduce heat to medium. Add remaining teaspoon oil to pot. Add onions and celery. Cook until the onions begin to brown, about 8 to 10 minutes. Add garlic. Cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomato paste and flour. Cook one minute.

Increase heat to medium-high. Add broth. Bring to a boil, scraping the browned bits off the bottom of the pan. Add the meat, any accumulated juices, thyme and bay leaf. Bring to a simmer.

Cover pot. Place in oven. Cook one hour. Stir in rutabagas. Cover and cook 30 minutes longer. Stir in carrots and parsnips. Cover and cook another 30 minutes. Uncover and cook until the meat is fork-tender and the vegetables cooked through. Remove from oven.

Add peas to pot. Remove bay leaf. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION PER SERVING

352 calories | 33 g protein | 37 g carbohydrates | 10 g fiber | 8 g fat
(3 g saturated) | 61 mg cholesterol | 216 mg sodium