



This week...

It's Not a Bee, It's a Sugar BUZZ!

Easter is just around the corner – the Cadbury Eggs, the Peeps, the Purdy's chocolate bunnies and, of course, Robin Eggs. Ah, the sweet taste of sugar. We all know that eating lots of sugar is not healthy, but what is considered 'a lot' of sugar? And what does it really do to us?

Sugar occurs naturally in all foods that contain carbohydrates, such as fruits and vegetables, grains, and dairy. Eating whole foods with natural sugar is okay. Plant foods also have high amounts of fiber, essential minerals and antioxidants, and dairy foods contain protein and calcium.

Since your body digests these foods slowly, the sugar in them offers a steady supply of energy to your cells. A high intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains also has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.

What is *not* healthy is when we consume too much **added sugar** — sugar that food manufacturers regularly add to products. Sugar is added to the majority of our processed food products, including breads, condiments, dairy-based foods, nut butters, salad dressings, and sauces. The sugar is added not just to impart sweetness, but is also used to extend shelf life and adjust attributes like the texture, body, color, and browning capability of food.

Reading food labels is one of the best ways to monitor your intake of added sugar. Look for the following and try to either avoid – or cut back on – the amount of sugars or how frequently you consume the foods that they are found in:

- brown sugar
- corn sweetener
- corn syrup
- fruit juice concentrates
- high-fructose corn syrup
- honey
- invert sugar
- malt sugar
- molasses
- syrup sugar molecules ending in "ose" (dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose)

Total sugar, which includes added sugar, is often listed in grams on the nutrition label.

How Much is Too Much?

The American Heart Association recommends that we should be eating much less sugar. Generally, adults and children are eating two to three times the recommended 'extra' sugar intake beyond natural sources in our food.

Daily Recommended Added Sugar Intake

Age Group	Sugar Intake (Teaspoons)	Sugar Intake (Calories)
Toddlers (Ages 1–3)	3–4 teaspoons	48–64 calories
Children (Ages 4–8)	5–8 teaspoons	80–128 calories
Girls & Women (Ages 9 and Over)	6 teaspoons	96 calories
Boys & Men (Ages 9 and Over)	9 teaspoons	144 calories

Considering these figures, the average Canadian eats 110 grams of sugars per day (26 teaspoons or 21 per cent of total energy intake, based on a 2,000 calorie-a-day diet).¹

The Sugar Impact

Sugar is addictive. It triggers your brain to release chemicals that make you feel good! That's why your body craves it, and that's why so many food manufacturers sprinkle it into their products. Scientists have proposed that sweet foods — along with salty and fatty foods — can produce addiction-like effects in the human brain, driving the loss of self-control, overeating, and subsequent weight gain. The effect drives you to buy more of the foods you crave.

Why is this addiction so dangerous to our bodies? Well, to start, sugar causes inflammation in the body and particularly in the brain.²

Sugar also:

- can cause obesity
- may result in Type 2 diabetes — although sugar consumption isn't directly related to developing diabetes, being overweight or obese is. When the sugar you eat stays in your blood instead of quickly converting into energy, your body can stop responding to the insulin that maintains normal blood sugar levels.
- will increase inflammation in our circulatory system and cause damage to the vessels in your heart
- is linked to some forms of cancer
- causes tooth decay – *just ask your dentist!*
- impacts our brain function

The brain uses more energy than any other organ in the human body, and glucose is its primary source of fuel. In the brain, **excess sugar** can slow cognitive function which impacts memory and attention – it has even been shown to shrink brain mass!

Want to know more about the sugar-brain relationship or even artificial sweeteners? [Check out this 5-minute video.](#)

How to Eat Less Sugar

Cut Back on Sugar-Filled Drinks: Did you know that two glasses of 100% apple juice contains more than 12 teaspoons (49 grams) of sugar. Your body does not recognize calories from drinks in the same way it does from food. Drinks don't make you feel as full, so people who consume lots of calories from drinks do not eat less to compensate.

Avoid Sugar-Loaded Desserts: Most desserts don't provide much in the way of nutritional value. They are loaded with sugar, which causes blood sugar spikes and can leave you feeling tired, hungry and craving more sugar.

If you really feel the need for something sweet, try these alternatives which add fibre and other good nutrients to your diet:

- **Fresh fruit:** Naturally sweet and full of fiber, vitamins and minerals.
- **Greek yogurt with cinnamon or fruit:** Rich in calcium, protein and vitamin B12.
- **Baked fruit with cream:** Try pears, apples or plums.
- **Dark chocolate:** Generally, the higher the cocoa content, the lower the sugar.

- **A handful of dates:** They're naturally sweet and extremely nutritious.

Avoid Sauces with Lots of Sugar: Sauces such as ketchup, barbecue sauce and sweet chili sauce are commonplace in most kitchens. Did you know that a single tablespoon serving of ketchup can contain 1 teaspoon of sugar?

Here are some other ingredients to try to add flavour to your food:

- **Fresh or dried herbs and spices:** Contain no sugar or calories and can have added health benefits.
- **Fresh chili:** Give your food a sugar-free kick.
- **Yellow mustard:** Tasty and contains virtually no sugar or calories.
- **Vinegar:** Sugar- and calorie-free, with a zing similar to that of ketchup. Some balsamic vinegars and creams may contain sugar.
- **Pesto:** Fresh and nutty, great on sandwiches or eggs.
- **Mayonnaise:** Although it's sugar-free, it's high in fat, so be cautious if you're trying to monitor weight gain.

Eat Full-Fat Foods: Low-fat options of your favorite foods — peanut butter, yogurt, salad dressing — are everywhere. However, the truth is that these foods usually contain more sugar and sometimes more calories than their full-fat counterparts. When you're trying to cut your sugar intake, it's often better to choose the full-fat version instead.

Eat Whole Foods: Whole foods are free of added sugar and other additives commonly found in processed foods. Eating more whole foods and cooking from scratch will reduce your sugar intake.

Eat More Protein and Fat: A high sugar intake is linked to increased appetite and weight gain. Conversely, a diet low in added sugar — but high in protein and fat — has the opposite effect, reducing hunger and food intake. To curb sugar cravings, stock up on protein and fat-rich whole foods, such as meat, fish, eggs, full-fat dairy products, avocados and nuts.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: If you keep high-sugar foods in the house, you are more likely to eat them. Instead, keep healthy low-sugar snacks in the house to munch on.

Get Enough Sleep: Good sleep habits are incredibly important for your health. A lack of sleep causes people to favour high-calorie, sweet and salty foods over healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. Get a good night's sleep to help you eat less sugar.

For more ways to eat less sugar – [click here!](#)

Up to the challenge?

For more energy, better skin, improved mood, and overall better health, can you cut back or even eliminate added sugar? [Here are some great tips](#) if you want to go cold turkey and make it through the sugar detox. However, to enhance your chance of success, perhaps wait until after Easter!

If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the [ReFresh](#) series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcvpva.bc.ca.

Sources

- ¹ [Diabetes Canada | Sugar & Diabetes](#)
- ² [Very Well Mind | How Sugar Affects the Brain](#)

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