


Sugar: Not so sweet for your health



Cookies, cake, and candy – we all know which foods are high in sugar. Or do we?

The average American is consuming too much sugar today, and the American Heart Association says this is hurting us. Sugar is loaded with calories, which can cause weight gain and heart problems. A high-sugar diet can also be a factor in diabetes. Sugar can cause cavities and other dental problems.

You might be surprised to find that many regular or even “healthy” foods have a lot of sugar in them.

That’s why the FDA is proposing a change to the food Nutrition Facts label that would list “added sugar.”

What is added sugar?

Some healthy foods contain a certain amount of natural sugar. These include fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains. The sugar (simple carbohydrate) naturally occurs in the food.

On the other hand, many packaged and processed foods contain “added sugar.” This sugar has been added to improve the taste. Many things you wouldn’t suspect, like “diet” foods, soup, yogurt, crackers, and salad dressings can contain a lot of added sugar.

How do I spot added sugar?

Sugar can be listed by many different names in the ingredients. So, it’s hard to know how much added sugar you’re getting. Until the nutrition label change takes place, the best thing to do is look at the sugar listing on the Nutrition Facts. Keep track of how many grams are in each serving of food and add them up each day. The AHA recommends:

- No more than six teaspoons (25 grams) for women per day
- No more than nine teaspoons (37.5 grams) for men per day

If you eat processed or packaged foods or drinks, look at the Nutrition Facts and see how much sugar each one contains. You may be surprised at how many grams of sugar you consume, even if you’ve been watching your diet. And drinks count too – fruit juice, sports drinks, and sodas are usually loaded with sugar. In fact, a 12-ounce serving of soda contains about 38 grams (nine to 10 teaspoons) of sugar.

Many food labels don’t list the word “sugar” in the ingredients. In fact, there are more than 50 different names for sugar! These include sucrose, dextrose, maltose, corn syrup, corn syrup solids, dextrin and maltodextrin.