

How sweet it is



Is sugar really bad for us? How about artificial or low-calorie sweeteners?

Our bodies need one type of sugar, called glucose, to survive. “Glucose is the number one food for the brain, and it’s an extremely important source of fuel throughout the body,” said Dr. Kristina Rother, pediatrician with the National Institute on Health and expert on sweeteners.

But there’s no need to add glucose to your diet, because your body can make the glucose it needs by breaking down food molecules like carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Some sugars are found naturally in foods such as fruits, vegetables, and milk.

Much of the sugar we eat isn’t found naturally in food but is added during processing or preparation.

Although sugar itself isn’t bad, said Dr. Rother, “Sugar has a bad reputation that’s mostly deserved because we consume too much of it. It’s now in just about every food we eat.”

You can cut down on added sugars. NIH in Health offers these suggestions:

- Choose water, fat-free milk, or unsweetened tea or coffee instead of sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks, and fruit drinks.
- Reduce sugar in recipes. If a recipe says 1 cup, use $\frac{2}{3}$ cup.
- To enhance flavor, add vanilla, cinnamon, or nutmeg.
- Eat fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits without added sugar. Choose fruits canned in their own juice rather than in syrup.
- Use fruits to top foods like cereal and pancakes rather than sugars, syrups, or other sweet toppings.
- Read the ingredients list to pick food with little or no added sugar.