



Watch sugar intake over holidays

I have a sweet tooth. I've been cutting back on sugar lately, but I'm worried about the holidays and all the extra sweets. Do you have any guidance?

It's a good idea to eat less sugar — added sugar, that is. It's estimated that Americans consume 16 percent of total calories from added sugar — the kind of sugar that's added to foods during processing or preparation, as opposed to the type naturally found in fruit and other whole foods.

That 16 percent is equal to 320 calories a day on a 2,000 calorie-a-day diet — far more than recommended. The American Heart Association suggests that women consume no more than 100 calories a day from added sugars, and men no more than 150 calories a day.

The nutrition community agrees that cutting back on sugar would be a very good thing. Some experts, including the authors of a commentary published in the journal *Nature* in February 2012, even go so far as to call added sugars “toxic” and advocate regulating them like alcohol. Others are more moderate, saying that added sugars are just a source of needless empty calories and cutting back would help people with their weight and triglyceride levels, which increase when you eat too much sugar.

In either case, you should know that overdoing it on added sugars — or other carbohydrates, including white rice, bread and other refined grains,

could cause your blood sugar to spike and then drop, possibly suddenly — and that variation in blood sugar could trigger more sugar cravings.

Be aware that avoiding added sugars can be a challenge. They're not only in cake, cookies, pie, candy and ice cream, but they're also in many processed foods, including barbecue sauce, salad dressing, canned soup, pasta sauce, granola bars, breakfast cereal, instant oatmeal, flavored yogurt, frozen dinners and many other foods. The largest contributor of added sugars in the diet is high-calorie soft drinks.

Looking at the “sugar” line on the Nutrition Facts label doesn't always help, because it lumps naturally occurring sugar together with added sugars. So you need to look at the ingredients listing to determine if the product has added sugar. Look for words like cane crystals, corn sweetener, evaporated cane juice or syrup, fructose, dextrose, glucose, sucrose, fruit juice concentrates, agave nectar (or other types of nectar), high-fructose corn syrup, honey, malt syrup, or molasses.

Or more simply: Eat fewer processed foods and more fresh produce; use fresh ingredients when cooking; and drink more water and milk. And limit yourself to just one or two of those Christmas cookies at a time.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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