

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

New dietary guidelines target added sugars

When the new Dietary Guidelines were announced a few weeks ago, I heard a lot about the recommendation to limit added sugars. But I'm sure that they've said that for years. Is there something new?

In previous editions of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans — which are revised and re-issued every five years — the recommendation was simply to limit added sugars. There were no specific targets. In the new guidelines, the experts went a step further and gave an actual limit, recommending that we consume no more than 10 percent of our daily calorie intake in added sugars.

That means if you're consuming 1,800 calories a day — the estimated level needed for a moderately active woman over 50, for example, or a sedentary woman under 50 — you should consume no more than 180 calories, or 45 grams, a day in added sugars. A typical 12-ounce can of soda has about 40 grams of added sugar. Three tablespoons of maple syrup have 36 grams. A slice of store-bought pecan pie has about 33 grams.

The reason behind the new recommendation is this: If you're eating enough food from all the food groups — vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy and protein — to meet your nutrient needs, you just won't have many more extra calories to play with and still maintain a healthy weight.

According to data gathered by the Dietary Guidelines committee, American adults currently average about 13 percent of their calorie intake from added sugars. Children, teens and young adults tend to eat much more. Nearly half the added sugars Americans consume come from beverages, and nearly one-third come from snacks and sweets, so those might be good places to start



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cutting back. But added sugars are included in a lot of processed foods. It's important to be aware of what you're eating.

To be clear, the 10 percent limit is solely for added sugars — that is, sweeteners added to other foods for flavor, such as sugar in your coffee, or for functional purposes, such as preservation, viscosity, texture, body and browning capacity. The sugars that occur naturally in milk and fruit come loaded with other nutrients — a good tradeoff. But even those products can have added sugars. Flavored milk and sugar-sweetened fruit juice beverages are just two examples to watch out for.

Currently, it can be difficult to differentiate between sugars that occur naturally in a food and sugars that are added. The Nutrient Facts label simply lists “sugars” as a subcategory under “carbohydrates” and doesn't explain if some or all of those sugars are added. The Food and Drug Administration is finalizing a new Nutrition Facts label, and it looks like it will include added sugars specifically. In the meantime, look for these items on the ingredients list as a clue: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, trehalose and turbinado sugar.

For more on the new Dietary Guidelines, see health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Carolyn Gunther, Ohio State University Extension specialist in Community Nutrition Education.

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