

Chow Line

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

Added sugar in yogurt can be hard to identify

A friend recently read a book on healthful eating and is now telling me I should stop eating yogurt because it contains so much sugar. I normally have a 6-ounce container after dinner, and I admit I was surprised at the sugar content when I looked at the label. Should I cut back?

First, take a second look at the label that surprised you so much. Currently, the Nutrition Facts label simply lists the amount of sugar in a product as a subset of its carbohydrates. This sugar can be naturally occurring, such as the sugars from the milk or fruit in the yogurt, or it can be sugars added during processing, such as sucrose, honey or high-fructose corn syrup. You can't tell which is which from the Nutrition Facts label.

Nutrition professionals have long differentiated between naturally occurring sugars and added sugars. Added sugars are often called "empty calories" because they aren't accompanied by vitamins, minerals or other beneficial nutrients. For example, when you consume sugar from milk or yogurt (lactose), you get calcium, too. When you consume sugar from an orange (fructose, glucose and sucrose), you also get vitamin C plus a whole host of other nutrients. But added sugar doesn't provide much more than added calories.

The new Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends limiting added sugars to no more than 10 percent of your daily calorie intake. If you normally eat 2,000 calories a day, that's 200 calories from added sugars, or 50 grams of added sugars a day. If you normally eat 1,600 calories a day, that's means 40 grams of added sugars.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is currently proposing changes to the Nutrition Facts label so



photo: Fuse

it would be easy for consumers to see how much of the sugar in a product is naturally occurring and how much is added. But in the meantime, figuring it out can take some detective work.

For yogurt, first look at the ingredients list for sugars. If they are listed in the first few ingredients, then the product could be high in added sugars. To get a ballpark estimate of how much of the sugar is "added sugar," compare the Nutrition Facts label of a similar yogurt that is sugar-free. If your yogurt has 25 grams of sugar, and the plain or artificially sweetened comparable yogurt has 12 grams, you can assume there are about 13 grams of added sugar in your yogurt.

Is that too much? It's hard to say. Those 13 grams could be perfectly reasonable depending on what else you eat over the course of a day. But if it's just one of many foods with added sugars you commonly eat, it could put you over the top.

If it's something you're concerned about, you could try yogurt made with zero-calorie artificial sweeteners. Or if that doesn't appeal to you, what about plain yogurt topped with fresh berries or other fruit? Or, just trim back added sugars from other foods and keep enjoying your nightly treat.

It's good be more aware of added sugars that you may not have known about, but it's also important to look at the whole diet. You have options.

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By Martha Filipic
614-292-9833
filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor: This column was reviewed by Irene Hatsu, food security specialist with Ohio State University Extension.

Chow Line is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, 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 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

College Marketing and Communications
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1043
614-292-2011

208 Research Services Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

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