



# SUGAR

You know it isn't good for you—but how much is really too much? We help you figure out the amounts you should be (but actually are) consuming and the secret places it's hiding

## UNWRAPPED

**W**ith Easter just around the corner, chocolate bunnies and brightly-wrapped eggs will soon become part of our daily diet. And while we know eating too many sweets can't be good for our health, it's not easy to figure out how much sugar we're actually consuming, especially when it is hidden in our favourite everyday foods.

Most of us are aware that a high-sugar diet can have terrible effects on our health, leading to problems like weight gain, diabetes and tooth decay—but are we in danger of consuming too much of the sweet stuff all year round?

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that women limit sugar consumption to less than 6 teaspoons, or 30 grams, per day. For men, they suggest less than 9 teaspoons, or 40 grams, and for young children no more than 3 teaspoons, or 15 grams. While these may sound like substantial amounts, when you consider a woman's maximum recommended serving is just half a cup of Häagen-Dazs sorbet or three quarters of a can of Coca-Cola, you soon realise just how quickly you can go over your daily limit.

**“The recommended healthy limit for women is just 30 grams a day... that's not even a full can of Coke”**

Add to this, according to a recent UAE Ministry of Economy report, the per capita sugar consumption in the Middle East is 34kg per year—significantly higher than the world average of 24kg—which means if we go by those figures, many of us are consuming about 93 grams per day, which is more than three times the recommended healthy amount.

### HIDDEN DANGERS

Worryingly, having too much of the sweet stuff can lead to a bona fide sugar addiction. Researchers from Princeton University claim that bingeing on sugar will cause the levels of feel-good chemical dopamine to rise in the brain, explaining the 'sugar high' we get after indulging in a saccharine treat. Once the dopamine levels drop, we crave a resurgence of these neurochemical changes and go into withdrawal if this isn't satisfied. The study, which saw scientists feed rats a sugar-and-water solution daily, showed they became dependent on it within just a month and, once it was taken away, suffered from

chattering teeth, paw tremors and head shakes. “The more sugar we eat, the more our bodies crave and feel we need it,” agrees Yasmine Haddad, Licensed Senior Dietician with Live'ly ([www.lively.ae](http://www.lively.ae)). While our bodies are designed to cope with natural sugars—such as those found in fruit and vegetables—today's processed supermarket goods are packed with hidden variations. Many food producers will add sugar to enhance flavour or help preserve goods, and that doesn't just mean processed, packaged sweets either.

Sugars don't always appear in powdery white form; while sucrose (the grainy white table sugar we pop into our tea) does count, there are other culprits that appear on food labels such as high fructose corn syrup, sugar cane syrup, glucose, lactose, maltose, fruit juice concentrate, molasses and chemical sweeteners. “We need to be aware that a lot of products available on supermarket shelves have hidden and added sugar,” says Yasmine. “For instance, breakfast cereals or instant oatmeals may seem healthy enough at a first glance but they often have a high sugar content not to mention large amounts of sodium,” she

adds. And she's right. Quaker Instant Oatmeal Strawberries & Cream may seem innocent enough, but just one serving contains 12 grams of sugar, which is more than a third of our daily recommended amount. Even diet-friendly products like Weight Watchers Very Berry Cereal Bars can contain more than we realise, with just one bar boasting nearly a quarter of our healthy daily intake at 7 grams each, while some savoury foods such as readymade tomato pasta sauces typically contain about 7 grams per half-cup.

### NATURE'S BOUNTY

It's not just brightly-wrapped treats we need to be wary of either—some fruits and vegetables are naturally high in sugar. That large orange or apple you think is 100 per cent healthy? It contains roughly 23 grams of sugar. That banana? About 17 grams, and that juicy ripe peach contains around 15 grams. “Naturally occurring sugar is, simply put, a form of carbohydrates,” says Yasmine. “There are two types of carbohydrates: sugar and →

## SUGAR in numbers

Want to know how much simple sugar is in these favourite fresh, everyday foods? Licensed Senior Dietician for Live'ly, Yasmine Haddad enlightens us...



ARABIC PITA BREAD (BROWN)

3g

½ medium loaf



STRAWBERRIES

7g

1 bowl



CANTALOUPE

11g

1 slice



CORN ON THE COB

5g

1 ear



BABA GHANOUSH

0g

3 tbsp



BAKLAWA

10g

2 pieces



APPLE

23g

1 whole, large



ARABIC PITA BREAD (WHITE)

5g

½ medium loaf



LABNEH (FULL-FAT)

0g

2 tbsp



BABY CARROTS

4g

8 carrots

starch, and natural sucrose is among them,” she explains. This can be found in relatively high levels in fruits like melons, pineapples, coconuts and tangerines, and vegetables like beets, carrots and peas. While these aren’t as bad as refined sugars (and fresh fruit has the added benefit of excellent nutrients), it’s worth noting how much you’re taking in as a part of your overall daily diet.

Still, this doesn’t mean we have to wave goodbye to our beloved desserts altogether. “It’s okay to have a bit of sugar sometimes,” says Yasmine, “just don’t have too much of it. Sugar provides our bodies with energy, and the boost we get from carbohydrates can also help prevent dehydration and fatigue and stimulate the brain through the glucose in our blood stream. However, consuming anything in excess will lead to health issues; in this case, weight gain, diabetes, tooth decay and addiction.”

### MAKE A CHANGE

Swapping regular, unrefined table sugar for options that are easier on our bodies is one suggested measure. Agave nectar (also known as agave syrup, available at Organics Cafe in Dubai Mall, Dhs18 for 250ml), has been widely applauded by health food retailers as a good natural substitute due to its low glycemic index (which measures how sugars in food react with your blood sugars). It’s also lower in calories than regular white sugar, contains nutrients such as calcium, and is sweeter so we tend to use less of it. However, we need to be careful to only buy pure, organic



we’re slipping up in an otherwise healthy diet. Melanie Thomassian, dietician and founder of Dietriffinic ([www.dietriffinic.com](http://www.dietriffinic.com)), suggests using these measurements as a guideline: 10g or more sugar per 100g of food is considered a lot, while 2g or less sugar per 100g of product is low. Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, author of *Beat Sugar Addiction NOW!* suggests combatting dependence by drinking more water, getting more sleep, and cutting out high-sugar products with no nutritional benefits, like sodas. Rather than setting an unrealistic goal like stopping your intake cold turkey, take it day by day—put a little less sugar in your tea each week and gradually reduce the amount you use when cooking. Chances are, you’ll barely notice the difference in taste once you’ve learned to adjust. Make sure you’re eating fibre-rich dishes at mealtimes so you feel full enough not to be tempted by the energy rush of a sugary

## “Always read the food labels to be aware of where sugar is hiding”




versions to ensure there are no additives.

“Fruit sugar, which is fructose, can also be a good substitute,” says Yasmine. “It’s still not ideal for people who already have Type 2 Diabetes, and we still have to be careful not to increase consumption of it too much, but it doesn’t elevate blood glucose levels as much,” she continues. Awareness is also a positive; reading food labels and being aware of where sugar could be hiding will help us know where

snack. Substituting natural fruits in place of processed sugar will take a lighter toll on your body and are a gentler way of indulging your sweet tooth. “Moderation is the key,” says Yasmine. “I believe there isn’t a single food out there that’s flat-out bad for you, it’s just a question of how much of it we’re consuming. We just have to be smart about our diets and make sure the foods we eat are a healthy balance across the board.” ■

### SNEAKY SUGAR SOURCES

Good Housekeeping does the legwork for you and finds out how exactly how much sugar is in popular sauces, cereals and drinks that can be found on our supermarket shelves. \*1 cup of juice or pasta sauce = 240ml \*\*1 serving of cereal = 30g.

CONDIMENTS & SAUCES		CEREALS & OATMEALS		DRINKS	
	Heinz Tomato Ketchup 8g 2 tbsp		Fibre Plus Chocolate & Almond Bar 5g 1 bar		Ceres Apple Juice 31g 1 cup*
	Hellman's Real Mayonnaise 0.4g 2 tbsp		Special K Red Berry Cereal Bar 9g 1 bar		Capri-Sun Orange Drink 30g 1 cup
	American Garden Creamy Caesar Dressing 1g 2 tbsp		Nutri-Grain Strawberry Cereal Bar 11g 1 bar		The Berry Company Blueberry Juice 23g 1 cup
	Dolmio Bolognese Original Pasta Sauce 15.3g 1 cup*		Kashi Heart-to-Heart Honey Toasted Oat Cereal 5g 1 serving**		Waitrose Organic Apple Juice 27g 1 cup
	Prego Traditional Pasta Sauce 20g 1 cup		Jordan's Cereal Country Crisp Strawberries 7g 1 serving		Robinsons Orange Drink 1.5g 1 cup
	Barilla Basilico Pasta Sauce 12.6g 1 cup		Nestle Fitness Honey & Almonds Cereal 8.5g 1 serving		Sunblast Organic Apple Juice 18.5g 1 cup