

Sugars: Learn More, Eat Less

Excess sugar intake is linked to an increased risk of tooth decay, weight gain and type 2 diabetes. In particular, the type of sugars that we eat too much of are called **'free sugars'**. These are mainly sugars which have been added to food and drinks and provide excess calories with limited nutritional value. Some nutritious foods and drinks however, like fruit and milk, contain naturally occurring sugars and it is important not to confuse these with the 'free' sugars in our diets. Read on to learn what free sugars are and some top tips for consuming less.

What Are 'Free Sugars'?

Working out what free sugars are takes some practice. It is healthier to eat fruit and vegetables whole - whether fresh, frozen or dried - because when a fruit or vegetable is processed (e.g. into a smoothie, fruit juice or puree) the sugars become free sugars. Milk and milk based products contain a naturally occurring sugar (lactose), but any sugars added to create flavour are free sugars (e.g. in a chocolate milkshake or flavoured yoghurt). Honey, other syrups and nectars are free sugars and so if you're looking to cut down your sugar intake, they are not a useful substitute.

Free Sugars ARE:

- Added sugars including **honey, syrups** and **nectars**.
- All sugars in drinks (except from the lactose in milk drinks), including in **smoothies** and **fruit and vegetable juices** and added sugars in **flavoured milkshakes** and **milk substitutes**, like **rice and almond drink**.
- All sugars in **jams, marmalades, fruit spreads** and **conserves**.
- All sugars in **fruit and vegetable purees**.



Free Sugars ARE NOT:

- Sugars naturally present in **whole, dried, frozen** and **canned fruit and vegetables**.
- Sugars naturally present in **stewed fruit and vegetables**.
- Natural sugars in milk and milk products (**milk, cream, cheese** and **plain yoghurt**).
- Natural sugars in **cereal grains, nuts** and **seeds**.



Check Ingredients

It is hard to tell the difference between the amounts of free and naturally occurring sugars that a product contains, because the RI refers to total sugars. Check the ingredient list: if sugar, glucose, honey, syrups and fruit juice concentrates appears in the top three ingredients then it is high in free sugars.

Portion Size

Often, the sugar content on the front of the packet refers to a serving that is smaller than the amount that you may eat or drink. You can reduce your sugar intake by eating and drinking a smaller portion.

Did You Know?

- 150ml of a fruit juice or smoothie counts as one of your 5-A-DAY, but no more! It's healthier to eat fruit and veg than to drink it.
- The daily maximum recommended intake of free sugars is less than 7 teaspoons for an adult and 5 - 6 for a child.
- Sugary drinks are the biggest contributor of free sugars in the diets of children and adolescents.
- We currently consume 2 - 3 times more free sugars than is recommended for our health.

Sugar Smart Shopping

Many everyday nutritious foods like breakfast cereals, which contain fibre and important vitamins, can be high in sugar. Checking food and drink labels allows you to spot these sneaky sugars and compare products and brands to make healthier choices. Some companies make label reading easier by using either colour-coded labelling or Reference Intakes on the front of packaging. Sugar is reported on packaging as **total sugars**, which includes both naturally occurring and free sugars.

Colour-coded Labelling

Colour-coded labelling makes it easy to see at a glance if a product is high (**red**), medium (**amber**) or low (**green**) in total sugars, fat, saturates and salt.

Guidelines for drinks are different to food because they don't make us feel full and so are easy to over-consume.

	LOW (green)	MEDIUM (amber)	HIGH (red)	HIGH (red) Per Portion
Total sugars in food per 100g	5g or less	More than 5g Less than 22.5g	22.5g or more	More than 27g (if serving size exceeds 100g)
Total sugars in drinks per 100ml	2.5g or less	More than 2.5g Less than 11.25g	11.25g or more	More than 13.5g (if serving size exceeds 150ml)

Reference Intakes

Reference Intakes (RIs) are general guidelines for the average amount of energy and certain nutrients that adults should not exceed in a day, and are stated as a percentage (%). Remember the RI for sugars is a **maximum of the total daily intake (90g) and not of the recommended maximum for free sugars (30g)**. If you're buying for children, the RIs for children are far lower than for adults.



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Action On Sugar



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Use this guide to make healthy choices when shopping

To consume less free sugars, saturated fat and salt, choose more food and drinks from the green column and less from the amber and red.

Limit these foods and drinks

Bread, cereals and starchy foods:

Sugar-coated cereals; Cereal bars;
Pizzas;
Buns; Pastries; Biscuits.

Dairy:

Whole milk; Flavoured milk;
Flavoured yoghurt and fromage frais with added sugars;
Ice Cream.

Fats and oils:

Some fats e.g. butter, ghee, dripping, lard, suet;
Some oils e.g. palm and coconut;
Pastry.

Meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives:

Meat or fish in high sugar sauce e.g. sweet and sour sauce/chutney;
Some curries;
Processed meat; Frozen meats;
Meat pies and sausage rolls; Meat free sausage rolls and pies.

Fruits and vegetables:

Pre-prepared vegetable dishes in sauces e.g. sweet and sour sauce;
Canned fruits in syrup;
Fruit puddings e.g. apple crumble.

Desserts and snacks:

Cakes; Biscuits; Confectionery;
Ice cream; Jelly;
Hot chocolate; Chocolate mousse; Milk chocolate;
Meringue; Sweet popcorn.

Drinks:

Energy drinks; Carbonated sugar-sweetened drinks;
100% fruit juice; Smoothies; Fruit juice from concentrate; Squash;
Flavoured milk; Flavoured water with added sugar.

Cook-in sauces, table sauces and spreads:

Spreads e.g. chocolate spread; jam;
Table sauces e.g. BBQ sauce, ketchup, sweet and sour sauce, sweet chilli sauce;
Some pasta and curry sauces;
Condiments e.g. chutneys.

Check the label

Bread, cereals and starchy foods:

Breakfast cereals;
Pasta with sauces.

Dairy:

Milk substitutes e.g. soya and almond drink;
Some flavoured yoghurts.

Fats and oils:

Low fat spreads;
Some spreads e.g. peanut butter.

Meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives:

Breaded poultry;
Fish cakes; Fish in batter;
Ready meals.
Baked beans.

Fruit and vegetables:

Salad with high-sugar dressing;
Processed potatoes e.g. croquettes, waffles, oven chips;
Processed fruit snacks;
Some ready-made vegetable soups;
Ready meals.

Desserts and snacks:

Some cereal bars; fruit buns; tea cakes; fruit cakes;
Some biscuits;
Dark chocolate.

Drinks:

Some fruit juice (watered down);
Low-sugar soft drinks;
Low-sugar squash.

Cook-in sauces, table sauces and spreads:

Spreads e.g. reduced-sugar jam;
Pasta and curry sauces.

Choose these foods and drinks more often

Bread, cereals and starchy foods:

Sugar-free breakfast cereals; Porridge;
Bread including rye and soda; Pasta;
Grains e.g. couscous, bulgur wheat, quinoa, gnocchi, rice;
Potatoes and plantain.

Dairy:

1% fat milk; skimmed milk;
Plain yoghurt;
Fromage frais.

Fats and oils:

Some oils e.g. olive, rapeseed, canola, peanut, sunflower, sesame, corn oils.

Meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives:

Fresh, lean meat and white or oily fish;
Tinned fish in water;
Tofu;
Soya mince.

Fruit and vegetables:

Fresh, frozen and dried fruits, vegetables and pulses;
Tinned fruit and vegetables in water.

Desserts and snacks:

Sugar-free jelly;
Plain popcorn;
Plain yoghurt with fruit;
Fruits, dried fruits and fruit salad without added sugars;
Unsalted nuts and seeds.

Drinks:

Water; Sparkling water;
Skimmed milk,
Tea without sugar; Coffee without sugar.

Cook-in sauces, table sauces and spreads:

Lemon juice;
Herbs and spices;
Low-sugar gravy.