Sugar and Heart Health

Sugar-sweetened foods and drinks contribute to overweight and obesity. These foods are also linked to other heart disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure and high triglycerides (a form of fat in your bloodstream).

You don't need to stop eating all sugar, but cutting back may improve your heart health. Read on for tips that can help!

Added Versus Natural Sugars

Americans eat and drink more sugar than ever before. Some of this sugar is natural and found in healthy foods.

For example, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and milk all naturally contain sugars. These natural sugars do not seem to harm our health.

However, most of the sugar we eat and drink is added to foods and beverages. Added sugars provide many calories without providing healthy nutrients like vitamins, minerals, or fiber.

The goal is not to cut out all sugar. A healthy approach is to simply reduce the amount of added sugars you eat and drink.

Tips for Limiting Added Sugars

- **Read food labels**. To find out if a food has added sugars, check the ingredients list for sugar, syrup, honey, or ingredients that end in the letters "ose" (such as "sucrose" or "fructose").
- **Avoid beverages with added sugar**. Water is always a great choice. You may also enjoy no-sugar or low-sugar beverages, like unsweetened iced tea.

Common Foods and Drinks with Added Sugars

- Candy
- Cookies and cakes
- Pies and other pastries
- Regular soda and soft drinks
- Energy or sport drinks
- Coffee and tea drinks
- Fruit drinks
- Alcoholic mixers

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- **Choose naturally sweet options**. To satisfy your sweet tooth without extra sugar and calories, choose fresh fruit for a snack or dessert. Or, try grilled pineapple slices, a baked apple, a frozen banana, or frozen grapes.
- **Maximize flavor**. Sometimes you just want to eat something sweet—and that's okay. Watch your portion sizes of desserts, and make choices that are satisfying in small amounts. For example, dark chocolate has a stronger flavor than milk chocolate, so you can satisfy your sweet tooth with a small portion.
- **Plan your meals and snacks**. Eating regular meals and snacks can help you feel satisfied throughout the day. A balanced meal plan can also help keep you from being tempted by less healthy foods.

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