Dietary Guidelines for Americans—Eat Less Sugar

New US dietary guidelines have been designed to help Americans choose and maintain a healthy diet.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans were created by the US Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture and were updated in 2016. The guidelines are intended to help Americans make healthier food and beverage choices. This is important because 2 of every 3 Americans are either overweight or obese, and obesity is one of the most important causes of preventable diseases like heart attack and stroke. A summary of these guidelines was published in the February 2, 2016, issue of JAMA.

What Are “Added Sugars”? Added sugars refers to any sugar that is added to a food in addition to the sugars naturally occurring in the food. For example, chocolate milk contains both natural milk sugar (known as lactose) as well as the added sugars that come from chocolate syrup.

Foods with a high amount of added sugars tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients. Reducing the amount of added sugars in your diet can help you lose weight and reduce your risk of heart disease and diabetes.

The Dietary Guidelines The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting intake of added sugars to 10% of total daily calories. If you take in more sugar than this, it becomes more difficult to get enough of the other nutrients you need without consuming too many calories. Tips for limiting intake of added sugars include

- Drink water or no-calorie drinks instead of soda; sports drinks; flavored coffee, tea, and dairy beverages; and sugar-sweetened juices. If you drink coffee, reduce the amount of sugar (or cream or other flavorings) you add. Sweetened beverages are the biggest source of added sugars in the US diet. Tap water and some bottled water do not have added sugar. If regular water is not to your liking, try a sparkling variety or a no-calorie flavoring.
- Replace sweets and sugary snacks with healthier options. Sweets and snacks are big sources of added sugars in the diet. While it is obvious that cookies, cakes, and ice cream are full of added sugars, even snacks that seem healthy, like granola bars or flavored yogurt, can contain high amounts of added sugars. Instead of a sugary afternoon snack, have a piece of fruit. The naturally occurring sugars in fruits are locked together with loads of beneficial vitamins, minerals, and fiber. A serving of fruit is also usually lower in calories than a serving of fruit juice or a sweet treat, making it a far healthier option.
- Learn how to spot added sugars. Food manufacturers use many different forms of sugar, and sometimes it is not clear if a food contains high amounts of added sugars. Look at the ingredient list of the food. Avoid foods with any of the following listed in the first 3 ingredients: sucrose, agave nectar, evaporated cane juice, high-fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, dextrose, honey, maple syrup, malt syrup, molasses, and turbinado. Visit ChooseMyPlate.gov for more information about added sugars.

- Shop the perimeter of the store. The foods that are highest in added sugars are usually found on the interior aisles of the grocery store. The easiest way to reduce added sugars in your diet is to limit the food you buy from this area of the store. Instead, shop the perimeter of the store. This is where the healthiest foods are usually placed—vegetables, fruits, lean meats, and fat-free or low-fat dairy. If you build your daily diet habits around these foods, then you will automatically be eating a diet lower in added sugars.

For More Information

US Department of Health and Human Services
health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/

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Conflict of Interest Disclosures: All authors have completed and submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and none were reported.
Source: US Department of Health and Human Services

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