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Sugar

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Sugar

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Estimates indicate that Americans use, on the average, more than 130 pounds of sugars and sweeteners a year. This includes sugars and syrups in jams, jellies, candies, cookies, soft drinks, cakes, and pies, as well as sugars found in products such as breakfast cereals, catsup, flavored milks, and ice cream.

When sugary foods make up a large portion of your daily calorie intake, they may replace other foods which offer necessary nutrients. Therefore, consume sweetened foods in moderation after you are certain that you have included adequate servings from the Basic Food Groups and if you can afford extra calories.

The major health hazard from eating too much sugar is tooth decay. The risk of dental caries is not simply a matter of how much sugar you eat. The risk increases the more frequently you eat sugar and sweets and if you eat foods that stick to the teeth. Obviously there is more to healthy teeth than avoiding sugars. Careful dental hygiene and exposure to adequate amounts of fluoride in the water are especially important.

Too much sugar in your diet does not cause diabetes. There is also no convincing evidence that sugar causes heart attacks or blood vessel disease. However, if energy needs are less than energy consumed, excessive sugar consumption contributes to overweight or obesity.

If you're concerned about the amount of sugar in your family's diet, or if you are looking for ways to cut back on calories, here are some suggestions.

1. Read food labels to learn which products contain sugars and other sweeteners. Ingredients are listed in order by weight: the item in the greatest amount is listed first, the item in the least amount is listed last. Dietary sweeteners appear on food labels not only as table sugar (sucrose), but by a variety of other names: dextrose, corn syrup, honey, molasses, fructose, lactose, fucose, maltose, maple syrup, brown sugar, corn sweeteners, natural sweeteners, invert sugar.

2. Substitute non-sweetened fruit juices, low-fat milk or water for sugary soft drinks, punches, fruit drinks and ades.

3. Cut down on obvious forms of sugar such as candies, cakes, pastries and cookies. Set your own limits. Confine sweets to special occasions or a few times a week. (Three simple desserts a week.)

4. Make the desserts you do eat count nutritionally. For example, custard, bran muffins or a

baked apple provide nutrients as well as fewer calories than a jelly-filled doughnut. Serve fruits for desserts or snacks.

5. Fruits packed in heavy syrup contain a great deal of added sugar. Drain well before serving for big calorie savings. Try to serve fresh fruit or those canned in fruit juices or light syrups.

6. Many cereals are presweetened. Check the label. Buy unsweetened cereals so you can control the amount of sugar added.

7. Use recipes that require small amounts of sugars or sweeteners or reduce the amount of sugar in your own recipes.

8. Cut back on sugar slowly with high rising cakes and yeast breads; they need sugar for texture and height.

9. To give your foods interest and enhance the impression of sweetness, use spices and flavorings such as: cinnamon, vanilla, cardamom, ginger, clove, allspice, pumpkin pie spice, almond or peppermint. Some of these spices and flavorings may contain small amounts of added sugar, but it won't equal the amount of sugar they replace.

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