

Sugar and Diabetes Plain Language Summary

Diabetes Canada believes that people with diabetes should have the best information available to take care of their diabetes. Knowing the most current research and recommendations will help people with diabetes make healthy food choices and reduce their sugar intake.

Background

Sugar comes in many forms:

- Glucose is another word for sugar. It is found naturally in fruits and many other foods that have carbohydrates. When we eat carbohydrates, our body turns them into glucose, which is the type of sugar found in our blood.
- Fructose is the type of sugar found in fruits, some vegetables, cane sugar, honey, and high-fructose syrup.
- Sucrose is found in the stems of sugar cane and roots of sugar beets. This is the sugar that most people are familiar with because it's the type of sugar people add to their coffee or use in baking.
- Maltose is found in certain grains (e.g., barley) and is less sweet than glucose, fructose, or sucrose.
- Lactose is the sugar found in milk and other dairy products.

All of these types of sugar will turn into glucose when you consume them and will affect blood sugar levels.

When any of the above types of sugar are added to food, they are called *added sugars*. Sugar is often added during food processing as a sweetener or as a preservative. When you look at the list of ingredients on the package, there are many other names for sugar, including cane juice, corn syrup, brown rice syrup, barley malt, agave nectar, and fruit juice concentrate.

Sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) include soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks, lemonade, blended coffee drinks, and iced tea. SSBs contain high amounts of sugar and empty calories, and are less filling than foods that require chewing and take longer to consume. People who drink a lot of sugar sweetened beverages are at a higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

Some healthy foods that have naturally occurring sugar are white milk, vegetables, and fruit. These foods have vitamins, minerals, and fibre, and are part of a healthy diet.

The amount of sugar added to food—specifically, packaged foods—has been steadily increasing since the 1960s. Furthermore, healthy food is not available to all Canadians equally.

Many rural, remote, and northern regions of Canada do not have secure access to affordable healthy food. People living in some neighbourhoods have easier access to less healthy and fast food rather than healthy whole foods.

Considerations

Consuming too many foods and drinks high in added sugars can lead to weight gain and increase the risk of developing prediabetes, type 2 diabetes, or gestational diabetes. Managing weight and eating healthy can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. For people already diagnosed with diabetes, adopting a healthy eating pattern improves blood sugar management and reduces the risk of developing complications from diabetes.

Recommendations

1. Canadians should consume less sugar by limiting added sugar to less than 10% of their total daily calories, drinking water instead of sugar sweetened beverages, and choosing whole foods instead of highly processed foods with added sugar.
2. The Government of Canada should tax sugar sweetened beverages, update nutrition labelling on packaged food to include added sugar, and require that restaurant menus include labelling of added sugar.
3. All levels of government should create legislation to stop marketing food and drink to children and should create a Working Group on Food and Beverage Marketing to Children.
4. All levels of government should make nutritious food available and more affordable to all Canadians, regardless of where they live.
5. Recreational events, schools, recreation facilities, and government spaces should replace sugar sweetened beverages with free water.

For people that would like more information, Diabetes Canada's position statement on [Sugar and Diabetes](#) gives an overview of the latest evidence about the role of sugar in the diet of people with diabetes and those at risk for type 2 diabetes.

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For More Information: Please visit www.diabetes.ca.

Contact: advocacy@diabetes.ca with inquiries about this Diabetes Canada position statement