What’s the Scoop on Sugar?

Over the past 30 years, Americans have steadily consumed more and more added sugars in their diets, which has contributed tooth decay, obesity, and other health problems. Reducing the amount of added sugars we eat cuts calories and can help you improve your heart health and control your weight.

The Scary Truth

Are you ready for the scary truth? A study conducted by the American Heart Association (AHA) found children ages 1-8 consumed up to 21 teaspoons of sugar a day and teenagers ages 14-18 consumed 34 teaspoons of sugar a day. This is about triple the recommended amount!

1 teaspoon of sugar = 4 grams of sugar

AHA Recommends New Added Sugars Limits for Children

The American Heart Association recommends children aged two to 18 consume less than six teaspoons of added sugars per day, and that children and teens limit intake of sugary drinks—including sports and energy drinks—to no more than eight ounces per week. Children under age two should not consume foods or beverages with added sugars, according to the AHA.
Naturally occurring sugars vs added sugars

- Naturally occurring sugars are found naturally in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose).
- Added sugars include any sugars or sweeteners added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation. Added sugars can include natural sugars such as white sugar, brown sugar and honey as well as other sweeteners (such as high fructose corn syrup).

Sources of added sugars

The major sources of added sugars in American diets are regular soft drinks, sugars, candy, cakes, cookies, pies and fruit drinks (sports drinks, fruitades, and fruit punch); dairy desserts and milk products (ice cream, sweetened yogurt and sweetened milk); and other grains (cinnamon toast and honey-nut waffles). For example, a 20 ounce bottle of Cola often found in vending machines, has roughly 16 teaspoons of added sugar.

Finding added sugars in food

Unfortunately, you can’t easily tell by looking at the food label if it contains added sugars. The line for “sugars” includes both added and natural sugars. Naturally occurring sugars are found in milk (lactose) and fruit (fructose). Any product that contains milk (such as yogurt, milk or cream) or fruit (fresh, dried) contains some natural sugars.

Reading the ingredient list on food labels can tell you if the product contains added sugars, just not the exact amount if the product also contains natural sugars.

Names for added sugars on labels include:

- Brown sugar
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Fruit juice concentrates
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Invert sugar Malt sugar
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Sugar
- Sugar molecules ending in “ose” (dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose)
- Syrup
Retrain Your Taste Buds
You don't need sugar as much as you think you do. In fact, you can train your taste buds to enjoy things that aren't as sweet. Try cutting out one sweet food from your diet each week. For example, pass on dessert after dinner. Over time, you will lose your need for that sugar taste.

Choose Good-for-You Sweets
You don't have to give up sweetness. Just get it from other sources. Try fresh berries or pureed fruit on oatmeal instead of sugar. Explore fruit that's dried, frozen, or canned (without too much added sugar). A glass of low-fat milk or low-sugar yogurt can help.

Kick the Habit in Baby Steps
If you make small, simple changes to your diet, it's easy to keep them up. Start by eating more fruits and vegetables. Drink extra water. Check food labels, and pick those that don't have a lot of sugar. Cut out a little bit of sugar each week. After a few weeks, you'll be surprised at how little you miss it. According to the new government survey, American teens have decreased consumption of soft drinks by 1/3 in last two years. Let’s continue this trend!
Find the Sugar Sources - Circle the item(s) containing the most sugar.

**Drinks:**
1. 20 oz Cola drink (Coca Cola) (65 grams)
2. 16 oz Smoothie (Jamba Juice) (approx. 60 grams)
3. 16 oz Frappuccino (Starbucks) (approx. 60 grams)
4. 20 oz Sports drink (Gatorade) (approx. 23 grams)

**Candies:**
1. Gummy Bears (17 pcs) (approx. 18 grams)
2. Small lollipop (approx. 9 grams)
3. Chocolate candy bar (Snickers, Kit Kat, etc) (20 grams)

**Cookies/Pastry:**
1. 1 oz chocolate chip cookie (approx. 11 grams)
2. 1 oz sugar cookie (approx. 8 grams)
3. 1 oz peanut butter cookie (approx. 10 grams)
4. 1 Pop Tart pastry (16 grams)

**Answers:**

**Drinks:** Coca Cola – 65 grams (=16.25 tsp sugar)
1. 20 oz Cola drink (Coca Cola) (65 grams)
2. 16 oz Smoothie (Jamba Juice) (approx. 60 grams)
3. 16 oz Frappuccino (Starbucks) (approx. 60 grams)
4. 20 oz Sports drink (Gatorade) (approx. 23 grams)

**Candies:** Chocolate candy bar – 20 grams (=5 tsp sugar)
1. Gummy Bears (17 pcs) (approx. 18 grams)
2. Small lollipop (approx. 9 grams)
3. Chocolate candy bar (Snickers, Kit Kat, etc) (20 grams)

**Cookies/Pastry:** Pop Tart pastry – 16 grams (=4 tsp sugar)
1. 1 oz chocolate chip cookie (approx. 11 grams)
2. 1 oz sugar cookie (approx. 8 grams)
3. 1 oz peanut butter cookie (approx. 10 grams)
4. 1 Pop Tart pastry (16 grams)

Resources: American Heart Association, WebMD, CDC, and Centers for Science and Public Interest