

Understanding sugar and its impact on your health

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate that provides energy for our bodies. When we consume sugars, our bodies break them down into glucose, which serves as a primary fuel for our cells. The term “sugar” generally refers to all sweet carbohydrates, with common examples including sucrose, honey, and corn syrup.

Sugars occur naturally in many foods, such as in fruits and dairy products. These naturally occurring sugars are often found alongside beneficial nutrients like fibre, vitamins, and minerals, making them part of a nutritious diet. However, sugars are also added to a wide variety of processed foods and beverages, often in forms like white, raw, or brown sugar, honey, and syrups.



While natural sugars in whole foods can be part of a healthy diet, added sugars tend to be found in foods that are low in essential nutrients and high in calories.

Consuming too much sugar can lead to a diet that is energy-dense, which may contribute to weight gain, obesity, and an increased risk of heart disease. Obesity, in turn, can lead to other serious health issues such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, fatty liver disease, and certain types of cancer.

Sugar is also closely linked to dental health problems. Bacteria in dental plaque feed on sugars, producing acids that can erode tooth enamel and cause cavities.

Given these health concerns, the World Health Organization suggests that added sugars should account for no more than 10% of your daily energy intake - roughly 12 teaspoons (50 grams) for an average adult. For even greater health benefits, reducing this to under 5% (about 6 teaspoons or 25 grams) is advisable.

When shopping for food, reading ingredient labels is essential. Ingredients are listed in order of quantity, so items higher up contain more of that ingredient.

Be aware that sugar can appear under various names, including:

- Sucrose
- Glucose
- Dextrose
- Maltose
- Maple syrup
- Molasses
- Coconut sugar
- Agave syrup



Over two thirds of all packaged foods and drinks contain added sugar. To reduce your intake, consider the following tips:

- Opt for whole foods like nuts, plain yogurt, fruits, vegetables, cheese, and eggs.
- Always check food labels for sugar content.
- Choose wholegrain options when possible.
- Select products with less or no added sugar.

A simple yet effective step is to cut back on sugary beverages such as soft drinks, sports drinks and iced teas. These drinks contribute excess calories and are linked to health issues like weight gain and tooth decay. Healthier alternatives include plain water, sparkling water, mineral water, and unsweetened milk.

Research indicates that drinking just one can of soft drink daily could lead to a weight gain of approximately 6.75kg over a year and increase the risk of tooth decay due to acidity. Additionally, consuming 340ml of sugary drinks each day has been associated with a 22% higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

By making mindful choices about sugar, you can significantly improve your overall health and well-being.



Honey Harissa Halloumi Tacos

Looking for a quick, easy, and delicious weeknight dinner?

These honey halloumi tacos are packed with vibrant flavours - sweet, sticky, spicy, and slightly salty. Plus, this is a low-sugar recipe, making it an excellent healthy and satisfying choice.

Serves 3 | Prep 5 minutes | Cook: 10 minutes

Ingredients list

- ▶ 200g halloumi
- ▶ 2 tsp harissa
- ▶ 3 tbsp honey
- ▶ 1 lime
- ▶ 400g tin white/cannellini beans
- ▶ 1 avocado
- ▶ 6 small tortillas
- ▶ 1 cup rocket leaves
- ▶ 400g tin corn kernels
- ▶ 100g tomatoes (diced)
- ▶ 2 tbsp coriander (finely chopped)

Method

- ▶ Combine harissa, honey and 1 tsp lime juice and mix well.
- ▶ Toss halloumi through until coated.
- ▶ Heat a frying pan on a medium-high heat and cook halloumi until golden brown on each side (approx. 5 mins).
- ▶ Meanwhile, mash together the beans and avocado in a bowl adding a generous crack of salt and pepper and a squeeze of lime juice.
- ▶ In a small bowl, combine corn, tomatoes and coriander together with salt, pepper and another squeeze of lime juice.
- ▶ Spread a generous tablespoon of avocado mix onto each tortilla, top with some rocket, halloumi and corn salsa and drizzle with remaining harissa and honey mix to serve.



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