



Americans Urged To Eat Less Added Sugar

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New guidelines from the American Heart Association (AHA) urge Americans to cut their added sugar intake because there is evidence that high intake of added sugars is implicated in a number of poor health conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure and risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

The new guidelines appear in a scientific statement by lead author Dr Rachel K Johnson, associate provost and professor of nutrition at the University of Vermont in Burlington, and colleagues on behalf of the AHA's Nutrition Committee of the Council on Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Metabolism and the Council on Epidemiology and Prevention and are published in the 24 August issue of *Circulation*, the journal of the American Heart Association.

Added sugars are sugars and syrups that consumers add themselves, for instance in coffee, on cereals, home-made cakes and cookies, and also that manufacturers add when they make food and beverages such as soft drinks, bought cakes, cookies, sugar-sweetened breakfast cereals, ice cream and doughnuts.

The AHA scientific statement explains how to limit intake of added sugars and how consuming too much of them may adversely affect metabolism, lead to shortfall in essential nutrients, and other poor health conditions.

The statement also gives, for the first time, the AHA's recommended limits for added sugar consumption.

The main source of added sugar in the American diet is soft drinks and other sugar-sweetened beverages. Johnson told the media that:

"One 12-ounce can of regular soda contains about 130 calories and eight teaspoons of sugar."

Johnson said (intake of added sugars, as opposed to sugar that occurs naturally in food, is implicated in the rise in obesity.)

(She said it's also linked with increased risk of high blood pressure, high levels of triglyceride (blood fats), and other risk factors for heart disease and stroke, plus there is an association with inflammation, another marker for heart disease.)

"Sugar has no nutritional value other than to provide calories," said Johnson.

"Consuming foods and beverages with excessive amounts of added sugars displaces more nutritious foods and beverages for many people," she added.

The AHA recommends women have no more than 100 calories (25 grams or 6 teaspoons) of added sugars per day, and men no more than 150 calories (37.5 grams or 9 teaspoons).

This is a considerable reduction in the current average consumption. Figures quoted in the AHA statement show that in 2001 to 2004, the average American consumed the equivalent of 22.2 teaspoons (355 calories) of added sugar per day.

The AHA statement says that no more than half of a person's "daily discretionary" calories should be from added sugars. This is the amount of calories that a person can safely eat after they have eaten enough food in the day to meet their body's need for nutrients, as long as they still have room left in their daily calorie "budget".

Think of it like a "non-essentials" budget: after your "essential" daily nutrient intake is satisfied from

eating healthy foods like fruit, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, high-fiber whole grains, lean meat, poultry and fish, then you may have some calories left over in your daily calorie "budget" to spend as you fancy.

So you could use this non-essential part of your daily calorie budget to either consume more of the "healthy" foods or indulge in the less healthy foods that contain added sugars, alcohol, and solid fats (including saturated fat and trans fat), or both. But what the AHA is saying is that if more than half of this discretionary, non-essential part of your daily calorie intake is from added sugars, you're increasing risks to your health.

A person's discretionary calorie budget depends on a number of factors, such as their age, gender, activity level and energy need.

For example, a moderately active woman in her early fifties, who eats around 1,800 calories a day and keeps to a healthy weight, would have around 195 discretionary calories a day, of which only up to 100 should be "spent" on added sugars.

If that same woman had a much more physically active lifestyle, consumed around 2,200 calories a day while still keeping to a healthy weight, then her discretionary budget would be much larger, around 290 calories, and she could safely use about 145 of those on added sugars, if she wished.

To make sure that you are getting all your essential nutrients and not consuming too many calories, Johnson suggests you look at your diet and check that high added sugar foods aren't displacing the healthy foods with essential nutrients.

She also suggests that people use their daily discretionary calories to enhance the flavour of essential nutrient rich foods. For example, eating a sweetened yogurt with fruit or a sugar-sweetened whole-grain breakfast cereal would be a better way to use your discretionary calories than candy that has no nutrients.

"Dietary Sugars Intake and Cardiovascular Health. A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association."

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