Health Update
The Sweeter Side of a Healthy Eating Plan
Week 2

The average American eats more than 32 teaspoons of added sugar every day. That is two-thirds cup of sugar! According to the Food Guide Pyramid, a person consuming a 2200 calorie diet should eat no more than 12 teaspoons (one-fourth cup) of added sugar each day. When used in moderation, sugar can be part of a healthy diet.

It is expected that candy, cakes and sweetened cereals have added sugar. However, did you know that foods you normally would not consider sweet often contain added sugar? Ketchup, salad dressing and barbecue-flavor potato chips are just a few examples.

To find out if foods have added sugar, check the Nutrition Facts panel on the label. Total sugar is listed on the panel in grams. Divide the number of grams by 4 to calculate the approximate number of teaspoons of sugar in a food. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Grams</th>
<th>Teaspoons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soft drink, 12 ounces</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate candy bar, 1 1/2 ounces</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cake with icing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetened cereal, 1 cup</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet pickle, 1 ounce</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketchup, 1 tablespoon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbecued chips, 1 ounce</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsweetened cereal, 1 cup</td>
<td>1 1/2</td>
<td>1/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When reading the Nutrition Facts panel, the total sugar includes natural sugar. However, if the first ingredient listed on the label is sugar, most of the sugar is probably added. Be careful as you read the label. Sugar has many forms and may be listed as something other than “sugar.” Here are some examples:

- Brown sugar
- Sucrose
- Dextrose
- High fructose corn syrup
- Molasses
- Maltose
- Fructose
- Lactose
- Corn sweetener
- Honey
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Sorbitol

There are some health concerns about sugar and its possible role in obesity, diabetes, hyperactivity and tooth decay. Currently, the only proven link is between sugar and tooth decay. Studies have shown that the amount of tooth decay is related to how often sugar is eaten. Either brush after meals and snacks, or rinse out your mouth with water.

In diabetes, blood sugar, or glucose, rises because it cannot get into the cells. Diabetes is not caused by eating a diet high in sugar. However, sugar and sugary foods can aggravate poor blood sugar control. Being overweight also increases the risk of diabetes. Eating too many calories leads to weight gain. Cutting down on the amount of sugar in your diet to lose weight may decrease your risk for diabetes.

Oftentimes, adults associate children’s hyperactive behavior with the consumption of excessive sugar. However, most reports from sound research on the behavioral effects associated with
Sugar consumption indicate sugar is not associated with hyperactivity. In addition, after a comprehensive evaluation, it was concluded by FDA, U.S. Surgeon General’s Report on Nutrition and Health, and the National Academy of Sciences Diet and Health that there was no solid evidence suggesting sugar contributes to behavioral changes.

One thing to keep in mind is the environment in which children consume large amounts of sugar. The excitement of a birthday party or a special event, like trick-or-treating or visiting a theme park, may be the reason for the hyper behavior and not necessarily the sweet snacks or treats.

Sugar is a carbohydrate, and carbohydrates are the major source of energy for the body. Many foods contain carbohydrates naturally, including bread, fruit, milk and vegetables. These foods are also high in vitamins and minerals, making them nutrient dense foods. Foods high in added sugar are generally low in vitamins and minerals making them a poor choice for the number of calories being consumed.

For healthy snacks, stock your refrigerator with fruits and vegetables that are washed and ready to eat. Resealable bags of carrot and celery sticks, cucumber or tomato wedges, or broccoli and cauliflower pieces make healthy snacking easy and convenient. Keep fresh fruits visible in a fruit bowl on the counter to make them more convenient. Bananas, oranges, and boxes of raisins will add great color to your kitchen and make healthy snacks easily accessible to you and your family. Other healthy snacks might include graham crackers, plain popcorn, or crackers with peanut butter. Making healthy snacks available and visible increases the likelihood of you and your family enjoying them more often.

Sweet foods do not have to be completely cut out of the diet. Moderation is the key. If sweet cravings exist, choose small portions of a favorite treat. Try satisfying your sweet tooth with fruit. It contains natural sugar and is high in vitamins and minerals. Add fresh fruits to desserts, salads and cereals. Use artificially sweetened puddings, gelatins and yogurt in moderation. And when only chocolate will do, have a small piece or two, not the entire box.

Developed by Danielle A. Gordon, Family & Consumer Sciences Agent II, University of Florida/IFAS – Leon County Extension, 3/05. Sources: Sugar and Your Health, The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service and How Sweet It Is!, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an equal employment opportunity/affirmative action employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex or national origin.