



# Kick the Sugar Habit

**CHALLENGE**  
 Replace soft drinks & sweets with water & fruit.

## Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “It’s hiding,” “Too much of a good thing,” and “Less is better.”
2. To complete the Challenge, you must drink water in place of soft drinks and serve fruit in place of traditional desserts on at least 22 days this month. Use your monthly Health Challenge Calendar to keep track.
3. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

### It’s hiding

In the days of the American pioneers, table sugar was used sparingly. Refined sugar wasn’t readily available or wasn’t affordable. In those 19<sup>th</sup> century days, an average American consumed an estimated 12 pounds of sugar each year. Today, that amount has climbed to 103 pounds a year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

You’re probably reviewing the last 12 months and thinking, “There’s no way I ate that much sugar!” Possibly. But the 103-pound figure includes more than table sugar. Sugar has many names: sucrose (white sugar), fructose (fruit sugar), lactose (milk sugar), dextrose (corn sugar), maltose (malt sugar), invert sugar (a mix of glucose and fructose), brown sugar, corn syrup, honey, maple sugar, and raw sugar. These are all common forms of sugar and have similar effects on your body and your health.

You expect candy bars to be made with sugar. But there’s also sugar in ketchup, canned vegetables, fruit snacks, juice, fat-free foods, and more. Read food labels. When you see any of these sugars listed as the first or second ingredient, you know that food is high in sugar. Some ready-to-eat breakfast cereals have sugar listed first on the ingredient list. This means there are more calories from sugar than there are from grains.

### More than sugar

Other foods that are rapidly absorbed and contribute to high blood sugar and high insulin levels are: white potatoes, white rice, white bread (and pancakes, waffles, or pastry made from white flour), soft drinks and sugar-sweetened drinks, snack foods (made largely from white flour and sugar), and refined and sweetened breakfast cereals. All of these foods are said to have a “high glycemic index.”

The Nurses’ Health Study showed that women who consumed diets with a high glycemic load had an increased risk of coronary heart disease.<sup>7</sup> All high-glycemic index (GI) foods contribute to the risk of developing obesity and diabetes. In the large Nurses’ Health Study, women who had a high intake of high-glycemic foods developed significantly higher rates of diabetes than those who ate those foods sparingly. The foods most closely linked to diabetes were white bread, soft drinks, white rice, and French fried potatoes.<sup>4</sup>

**The average American consumes 103 lbs. of sugar annually. This table shows the breakdown by percentage.**

Soft drinks	33%
Sugars and candy	16%
Cakes, cookies, and pie	13%
Fruit drinks with added sugar	10%
Dairy products (e.g., ice cream, sweetened yogurt)	9%
Sweet rolls and pastry	6%

High-fructose corn syrup is primarily consumed in carbonated soft drinks, sweetened fruit drinks, iced tea mixes, other drinks, and syrup and sweet toppings. In all, 36.3% of sugar and corn sweeteners are consumed in carbonated soft drinks, fruitades, and other nonalcoholic drinks.



## Too much of a good thing

Nearly everyone enjoys sweet treats and sugary drinks to varying degrees. Worldwide, the word “sweet” describes more than just a pleasant taste – it also connotes a pleasant personality (e.g., “She is so sweet.”) and desirable experiences (e.g., “That was a sweet snowboard trick!”).

It’s okay to eat sweet foods. Fruits, berries, and sweet potatoes, for example, are delightfully sweet. The problem isn’t necessarily the sugar, either; it’s that sugars often crowd out more nutritious foods, like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy protein. Sugars contain “empty calories” – they have lots of calories but provide few, if any, nutrients.

### It works like this:

1. You feel hungry, so you grab a quick snack – like a candy bar or a bag of chips.
2. Sugars (either the actual sugar or the sugar found in high glycemic index foods) are rapidly absorbed by your body, causing your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels to rise quickly.
3. To combat elevated glucose levels, your body produces a high amount of insulin. Your blood sugar levels drop rapidly and you feel hungry all over again.
4. In response to the rapid drop in blood sugar levels, your body begins to store an extra supply of calories for future energy needs. It doesn’t want to starve, after all. When excessive, the stored energy is turned into fat and contributes to obesity. So, all you gained from eating the high-sugar foods was a short burst of energy – and a little more fat.

Nutritious foods, like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy proteins, are packed full of vitamins and minerals and are generally low-calorie. The naturally-occurring sugars in these foods are absorbed more slowly, so they provide a more even energy supply. They also help you feel full longer.

Sweets, such as tempting desserts, encourage overeating – even if you’re not hungry. When was the last time you over-ate on broccoli or carrots? They are not nearly so tempting (or high in calories) as ice cream, cake, or a cinnamon roll.

*It’s okay to eat sweet foods...*



*Fresh fruit salad*



*Ginger tea with lemon*



*Frozen yogurt topped with fruit & nuts*



*A sweet nectarine*

*Remember that the biggest problem regarding sugar consumption is that it takes the place of nutrient-rich foods which keep us healthy. It is important to eat a healthy, balanced diet, and eat sugar in moderation.*

## Try these suggestions to help you eat fewer sugars.

- Eat a pear, peach, apple, or other sweet fruit to satisfy a sugar craving.
- You might feel deprived if you don’t eat a few sweets. Reserve high-calorie desserts for special occasions, and eat them in moderate amounts.
- Choose desserts that are better for you – such as frozen yogurt topped with fruits and nuts.
- Dentists recommend that if you eat sweets, eat them at meal time (not between meals) and brush afterwards.
- Buy whole-grain, unsweetened cereals for breakfast. If you need a sweeter taste, add berries.

## Less is better

Eating a lot of sugars contributes excess weight, high blood triglycerides, and high blood sugar and is a factor in diabetes. Of course, a high intake of sugars is linked to increased risk of tooth decay. And, excess sugars might increase the risk for osteoporosis, particularly among girls who consume soft drinks in place of milk. Soft drinks may also significantly increase the risk of gout<sup>6</sup> and cancer of the pancreas.<sup>1</sup> A large, 7-year study found that women who drank a lot of soft drinks had nearly twice the risk of pancreatic cancer, when compared to women who rarely or never drank them. Adding sugar to coffee, tea, and cereal increased the risk by 69%.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans<sup>3</sup> recommends limiting added sugars in the diet to about 8-10 teaspoons daily. That’s less than the amount in one soft drink! In other words, most Americans eat far too much sugar and should limit soft drinks and other sweets. Here are some suggestions to help you kick the sugar habit:

You don’t need any added sugar – the best sweets are fresh fruits, such as berries, melons, peaches, cherries, pineapple, oranges, apples, and bananas. The sugar found in fresh fruits is absorbed more slowly and doesn’t cause the rapid increase in blood sugar levels. And, they taste great, too!



## References

### How much added sugar?

FOOD	Teaspoons
Fresh fruit, all	0
Sweet potato	0
Gatorade, 8 oz.	3¼
Fat-free pudding, 4 oz.	4
Candy bar, 2.1 oz.	5¾
Honey Bun (muffin), ¾ oz.	6
Low-fat fruit-flavored yogurt, 8 oz.	7
Sparkling cider, 8 oz.	7
Peaches, canned in heavy syrup, 8 oz.	8½
Chocolate Fudge Cake, 3 oz.	8½
Cinnamon roll w/icing, 4.7 oz.	9½
Pepsi, 12 oz.	10¼
Pancake syrup, ¼ cup	10¼
Lemon Fruit Pie, 4½ oz.	11½
Vanilla Shake, 20 oz.	12
Cinnabon®, 7½ oz.	12¼
Sunkist® Orange Soda, 12 oz.	13
McDonald's McFlurry™ with Butterfingers®, 10 oz.	13¾
Dairy Queen Mr. Misty Slush®, 32 oz.	28

1. Larsson SC, et al. Consumption of sugar and sugar-sweetened foods and the risk of pancreatic cancer. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2006 Nov;84 (5):1171-1176.
2. Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2007.
3. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. 2007.
4. Liu S, Willett WC, et al. A prospective study of dietary glycemic load, carbohydrate intake, and risk of coronary heart disease in US women. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2000;71:1455-1461.
5. Haley S, Reed J, Lin B-H, Cook A. Sweetener Consumption in the US: Distribution by Demographic and Product Characteristics. *Economic Research Service. USDA*. August 2005.
6. Choi JW, et al. Sugar-sweetened soft drinks, diet soft drinks, and serum uric acid level: the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. *Arthritis and Rheumatism*. 2008 Jan 15;59(1):109-16.
7. *Territorial Reminiscences. Personal account of Mary A. Thompson Orrison. Palmyra, Nebraska Pioneer*.
8. Reed DR and McDaniel AH. *The Human Sweet Tooth. BioMed Central Oral Health*. 2006: 6(Suppl 1):S17.





# Kick the Sugar Habit

## Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record each day you drink water in place of soft drinks and serve fruit in place of traditional desserts.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you drank water instead of soft drinks and chose fruit or fruit-sweetened treats. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this practice for a lifetime of good health and wellbeing.
4. Turn in your Health Challenge™ form if requested, or enter your completion of this Challenge on the Health Activity Tracker report for the month, if applicable. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

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MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____		
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I chose fruit-sweetened drinks and desserts  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

