



MEALTIME MEMO

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REDUCING ADDED SUGARS



The sweetness of sugar may tempt our tastebuds, but the health consequences of eating too much sugar are concerning, especially for children whose dietary habits and taste preferences are still developing. In this *Mealtime Memo*, we will uncover the secrets of added sugars and equip you with the knowledge to identify them in the products you consume.

Natural Versus Added Sugars

First, let's discuss the difference between natural sugars and added sugars.

Natural sugars occur naturally in foods (i.e., not added during processing). These natural sugars are primarily found in foods with nutritional value containing vitamins, minerals, protein, or fiber.

Examples of natural sugars are:

- Lactose (the sugar in dairy products)
- Fructose (the sugar in fruit)



Added sugars include sugars, syrups, and other sweet ingredients added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation.



- Processed foods often contain high amounts of added sugars. In the U.S., the leading sources of added sugars are sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts, and sweet snacks (e.g., cookies, brownies, cakes, pies, ice cream, doughnuts, and pastries).
- Sugars are added to foods such as jarred pasta sauce, ketchup, yogurt, cereal, juice, and canned fruit.

How to Find Added Sugars

There are two ways to detect added sugars in food products.

- 1. Nutrition Facts label:** The Nutrition Facts label specifies the total amount of sugars and how many grams of added sugars are in a product.

2. Ingredients: The ingredients list will indicate if sugars are in a food or beverage. Added sugars go by many different names. Below are some other names for sugars that you may see listed.

- Brown sugar
- Cane juice
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Molasses
- Maple syrup
- Sucrose, glucose, fructose, dextrose, and other ingredients ending in “-ose”



Ingredients are listed by weight, so the first two or three are the most dominant ingredients. Avoid foods that list “sugar” as the first or second ingredient.

Health Consequences of Too Much Sugar

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends limiting added sugars to less than 10 percent of daily caloric intake. For children ages 2–4 years, this means they should get less than 25–35 grams (6–8 teaspoons) of added sugars per day. Children under the age of two years should not be given foods or beverages with added sugars.



Many children consume more than the daily recommended amount of added sugars. For children ages 2–4, 57% of girls and 61% of boys exceed the recommended limit of added sugars each day. It’s even higher for older children—77% of girls and 80% of boys aged 5–8 exceed the limit each day.

Foods high in added sugars tend to be heavily processed, high in calories, and lacking essential nutrients. While small amounts of sugars are not harmful to the body, eating too many added sugars can contribute to health problems such as obesity, insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

Reading Nutrition Facts Labels

When comparing food products, it is important to understand *Total Sugars* and *Added Sugars* listed on the Nutrition Facts label. Let’s use canned fruit to help explain the difference.

$$\text{Total Sugars} = \text{Added Sugars} + \text{Natural Sugars}$$

- Total Sugars include both natural sugars and added sugars. All canned fruit will have an amount in the Total Sugars line because all fruit contains natural sugar.
- Canned fruit packed in juice, light syrup, or heavy syrup will also have an amount in the Added Sugars line.

Look at the sample labels below to compare the amount of added sugars in a serving of canned pears in heavy syrup and a serving of canned pears in water.

Canned Pears in Heavy Syrup

Nutrition Facts	
3.5 servings per container	
Serving size	1/2 cup (128g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	100
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 25g	9%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%
Total Sugars 24g	
Includes 12g Added Sugars	24%
Protein 0g	0%

Canned Pears in Water

Nutrition Facts	
3.5 servings per container	
Serving size	1/2 cup (128g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	45
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 25g	4%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%
Total Sugars 9g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 0g	0%

Total Sugars =
Added Sugars
+
Natural Sugars

As you can see, a 1/2 cup serving of canned pears in heavy syrup has 12 grams of added sugars compared to zero grams (0g) of added sugars in the canned pears in water. Reading the Nutrition Facts labels to purchase the healthiest options is essential.

Tips for Reducing Added Sugars

CACFP meal pattern requirements aim to decrease added sugars on menus by prohibiting grain-based desserts, limiting sugars in cereal and yogurt, and limiting juice to one meal or snack per day. Here are some other ways you can reduce added sugars on your menus.

- Prepare meals from scratch to give you more control over the types of ingredients and the amount of added sugar included in meals.
- Substitute half of the sugar with unsweetened applesauce or mashed ripe banana when baking. For example, instead of 1 cup of sugar, use 1/2 cup sugar and 1/2 cup mashed fruit. You may need to test and slightly adjust the recipe several times to determine an acceptable product.
- Replace sugary toppings with fresh berries, peaches, or sliced bananas on plain, unsweetened cereal, oatmeal, pancakes, waffles, or yogurt.



Additional Resource



Team Nutrition's [Nibbles for Health: Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children](#) includes a topic on *Developing Healthy Habits With Less Sugar*.