

# Sugar, Sugar

The not-so-sweet truth

by MADELEINE GREY

When a well-meaning relative offered a heart-shaped box of Valentine treats to her child, Judy Turner was aghast. Two pounds of sweetness was not what she wanted her preschool daughter to binge on. But when the Aurora, Ont., mother and psychologist tactfully declined it, she was surprised by her relative's strong reaction.

"I've been called ruthless and mean for supposedly 'depriving' my child of sugar," says Turner. "People get very mad at me." But Turner wonders if it's not the other way around. Have we gone bonkers over sugar?

"Canadians eat far too much sugar," says Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., nutrition coach Linda Barton. "I work with overweight children and one of the first things I challenge the family on is sugar."

Part of the problem with sugar is its hazy definition. Unlike those clear-cut four food groups, sugar falls under the nebulous descriptor "other foods" in *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*, which instructs us to eat it in moderation. But does 13 percent of our calories represent moderation? That's what the Canadian Sugar Institute estimates the average Canadian consumes, which translates into about 16 teaspoons of total added (not naturally occurring) sugars per day.

## HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Registered dietitian Cathy Richards of Kelowna, BC, says that's too much. She'd like families to adhere to the World Health Organization recommendation of no more than 10 percent of calories. Richards says the average child consumes about 1,600 calories a day, so sugar should be limited to about 10 teaspoons a day.



### The Dish on Portions

calories	196
protein	2.8 g
fat	5.8 g
carbohydrates	33.9 g
iron	11%*
folate	11%*
niacin	10%*
vitamin B <sub>1</sub>	15%*

\*of recommended daily amount

Two-Berry Phyllo Wraps recipe, p. 55

Easier said than done. Richards points out that in a few easy gulps, kids can quickly overdo it with beverages alone, whether it's a can of pop or a cup of white grape juice. Both supply a day's limit — or more, depending on the serving size.

So we have a national sweet tooth: Does it matter? Many parents see a link between sugar consumption and unruly behaviour, yet studies come up

empty when looking for a definitive link between sugar and hyperactivity. Increasingly, nutritionists speak of the perils of low blood sugar — a sudden crash following meals singularly high in sugars or simple carbohydrates. A quick fall in blood sugar can result in a moody, hungry child, just hours after a meal.

Meanwhile, sugar has been scapegoated for growing childhood obesity, but dietitians agree that excess calories and less activity, not sugar (fat or carbs), cause the problem. One fact is irrefutable: Sugar can cause tooth decay. Sure, regular brushing comes to the rescue, but not if children are bathing their teeth in sweet stuff all day long — juice boxes, bubble gum, lollipops...

### Divide by 4

Learn how to count sugar with this simple trick. A teaspoon of sugar is 4 g. If a serving has 12 g sugar, divide by 4 to know it contains 3 tsp. There are 16 calories in 1 tsp sugar.

Despite her sugar-hating reputation, Turner does allow nine-year-old Sarah candy on a daily basis. “She has her own stash and is old enough to dispense it herself. She’s allowed one piece of candy or gum a day and she knows to enjoy it right after a meal,” Turner explains, following her paediatric dentist’s advice that saving treats for the end lessens the amount of decay-causing bacteria.

It also solves another problem: the displacement of nutrients in children’s diets. When kids have high-sugar drinks or snacks between meals, they can fill up on empty calories rather than much-needed nutrients. But parents can turn the tables by offering meals and snacks packed with nutrients and top them off with a little bit of sugar.

**FAKING IT**

The Internet is rife with perilous stories associated with artificial sweeteners, and many holistic doctors dub them toxic. Richards agrees that parents fear the fakers, but she believes they are safe and OKs the occasional diet pop. Besides, she points out, all artificial sweeteners used in Canada have been approved by Health Canada along with acceptable daily intakes (ADIs). However, the US-based Center for Science in the Public Interest has recently called upon the FDA to review the safety of aspartame (also sold as Equal and NutraSweet and found in Diet Coke, Diet Pepsi and thousands of other foods) in light of an Italian study linking it to cancer. Last July, Health Canada announced plans to review this new information.

**GETTING SUGAR ON YOUR SIDE**

So does sugar have a sweeter side? You bet. Richards says parents can make good use of sugar, adding it to nutritious foods to up the flavour factor, such as brown sugar on baked squash. When we self-administer, sugar is kept under control.

But enter processed foods and our grip gets slippery. For example, who knew that ketchup has a lot of sugar (almost one teaspoon in every tablespoon)? And does everyone know that glucose, sucrose, dextrose, fructose and high-fructose corn syrup (frequent guests on ingredient lists) are code for sugar? Sugars are now listed on the new Nutrition Facts labels, but in hard-to-understand grams (see “Divide by 4,” p. 53, for easy conversion).

**SWEET REVELATIONS**



Snack-size (15 g) Oh Henry! bar: 7 g sugar



Full-size (62 g) Oh Henry! bar: 29 g sugar



Kinder Surprise egg: 10 g sugar



3 licorice Twizzlers: 22 g sugar



mini-roll Life Savers (14 g roll): 12 g sugar



5 marshmallows: 22 g sugar



Betty Crocker 26 g pouch Scooby-Doo Fruit Snacks: 14 g sugar



Sun-Rype 37 g FruitSource bar: 28 g sugar

LUIS ALBUQUERQUE

**Two-Berry Phyllo Wraps**

Here’s a low-sugar dessert that offers crispy, crunchy taste and the nutritious bonus of fibre-filled berries.

- 12 sheets defrosted phyllo pastry
- ¼ cup (50 mL) unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) water
- ½ cup (125 mL) fine bread crumbs
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) brown sugar
- 2 cups (500 mL) frozen raspberries
- 2 cups (500 mL) frozen blueberries
- ½ cup (125 mL) brown sugar
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp (5 mL) lemon juice
- 1 tsp (5 mL) lemon zest
- pinch salt
- 1 tsp (5 mL) icing sugar (optional)



Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Spread out a stack of 12 phyllo sheets flat on the counter and cover with damp tea towels. In a small bowl, combine butter and water. In another small bowl, combine the bread crumbs with the 2 tbsp brown sugar. In a medium bowl, mix together raspberries, blueberries, sugar, flour, lemon juice, zest and salt.

Lightly baste a phyllo sheet with butter mixture, sprinkle with bread crumb mixture and repeat, with 2 more sheets, layering each on top. Spoon a quarter of the berry mixture along the long edge of the top phyllo sheet, leaving about an inch from the edge to help make rolling easier. Roll it up. Slice into thirds.

Slash each piece decoratively on the diagonal 3 times and arrange on a parchment-paper-lined baking sheet. Repeat 3 times. Bake 30 minutes or until golden brown. Dust with icing sugar before serving. Serve hot — or cold (less crunchy but still tasty).

Makes 12 wraps.

*Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests our Nutrition column using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.*

Now lower-sugar products like Quaker’s reduced-sugar instant oatmeal and Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes ½ Less Sugar have appeared on shelves. Both products boast less sugar (without any artificial sweeteners), more starch and about the same calories as their regular counterparts. Rather than scooping up these new products, a more sensible approach among parents might be to serve whole-grain, high-fibre, naturally low in sugar cereals, then let kids sprinkle 1 tsp sugar (just 4 g!) on top.

Sugar can be a slick slope, prompt-

ing parents to send out some troubling, sweet messages of love through food, especially come holidays. This Valentine’s Day, Turner plans to tell Sarah how much she loves her with lots of little treats that aren’t sugary, like a little heart-shaped box, a Valentine pin and a card — topped off with a single piece of really scrumptious chocolate. ♥

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