

Cutting back on sugar can help lower your health risks

Written by meg sibal, m.d.

Saturday, 07 January 2017 14:47



THE panelists crafting the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans emphasized that we're consuming much more sugar than is healthy for us and have advised us to pare our intake of sugar — but have acknowledged that the sugar bowl isn't the principal villain at the dining table, since about 80% of the sugar we eat is added to packaged and commercially prepared foods, says the December 2016 issue of the Harvard Medical School Harvard Women's Health Watch.

While sugar, in the form of glucose, supplies the body with energy, we don't need to eat any sugar, because our bodies can convert carbohydrates — and even fat and protein, if necessary — to glucose.

Also, although fruits, vegetables, and dairy naturally contain some sugars, those sugars are "packaged" with vitamins, minerals, and fiber and are released slowly into the blood.

The USDA adopted the phrase "added sugars" in 2000 to distinguish sugars put in during processing, in preparation, and at the table — added sugars insert "empty calories" into a food or beverage because they aren't associated with any other nutrients.

The average American consumes more than 350 calories a day from added sugars, a) often in sweetened beverages and breakfast cereals, but also in a wide array of other foods, b) from flavored yogurt to ketchup.

Cutting back on sugar can help lower your health risks

Written by meg sibal, m.d.

Saturday, 07 January 2017 14:47

“The science is very clear that added sugars carry a lot of health risks — many studies have shown that added sugars are associated with an increased risk of diabetes, hypertension, and even heart disease,” says Dr. Frank Hu, the professor of nutrition and epidemiology at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

The U.S. guidelines advise getting less than 10% of calories from added sugars — fewer than 40 grams daily for a woman eating 1,600 calories a day.

The American Heart Association favors cutting added sugar consumption even more — to 24 grams a day for women.

While beverages are the most important source of added sugars, there are additional ways to reduce your intake of added sugars, including:

- **Give your taste buds time to adjust** — a) If you usually take two spoonfuls of sugar in your coffee or tea, for instance, start by going to one-and-a-half for a week, then down to one, or b) If sodas are part of your regular routine, cut your consumption by one a week, then two.
- **Adapt your recipes** — You can make your recipes less sugary by reducing a little bit at a time — try using one-quarter less sugar than the recipe calls for, then one-third — right up until you notice the difference. Later, you may come to prefer the less sweet variation.
- **Reach for fruit rather than juice** — Squeezing fruit breaks down the cells and releases sugar into the juice, so that it enters the bloodstream more rapidly; moreover, a glass of juice is usually the caloric equivalent of three whole fruits — thus, a) instead of drinking juice, eat a piece of fresh fruit; b) you can make fruit drinkable and still preserve its fiber by blending it with almond milk or low-fat yogurt in a smoothie; and, if you just can't give up juice, c) make it 100% fruit juice that is not sweetened and limit the amount to 4-ounce glass.
- **Check your cereal box** — If you enjoy cold cereal or instant oatmeal for breakfast, a) look at

Cutting back on sugar can help lower your health risks

Written by meg sibal, m.d.

Saturday, 07 January 2017 14:47

the labels and choose one with minimal added sugar; also, note that cereals made with refined grains are quickly broken down into sugars in the body — b) to wean yourself off your favorite cereal, try combining it with a whole grain, high-fiber cereal, and add fruit.

- **Always read labels carefully** — many processed and packaged foods contain added sugars — in addition to cereals, breads, crackers and cookies, these include salad dressings, spaghetti sauces, soups, condiments and more.

- **Scrutinize ingredient lists** — manufacturers use several different types of sugars, so look not just for sugar, but also for syrups and words ending in “ose,” like sucrose, fructose and maltose.

Fortunately, you won't have to do this much longer, since the FDA has called for new food labeling that includes “added sugars” in the Nutrition Facts box — the rule will go into effect on July 26, 2018, the health letter concludes.