

'Toxic sugar' message goes mainstream

Dr. Robert Lustig's "Sugar: The Bitter Truth" video has been viewed more than 800,000 times since its posting in 2009 – no small feat for an academic lecture on biochemistry. In the video he calls sugar a "toxin" and a "poison" – even "evil." He believes sugar should be thought of as a substance, like cigarettes or alcohol, that is killing Americans in the manner of cigarettes and alcohol.

Lustig is the leading expert in childhood obesity at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine. He argues that fructose (too much) and fiber (not enough) appear to be cornerstones of the obesity epidemic through their effects on insulin. He believes excessive sugar in the American diet contributes to diabetes as well as heart disease, hypertension, and cancer. To see his video, visit <http://www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=16717>.

While being against fructose, Dr. Lustig isn't a fan of low-carb diets. He says it's the type of carbohydrate is what's important. Refined sugar (that is, sucrose) is made up of a molecule of the carbohydrate glucose, bonded to a molecule of the carbohydrate fructose – a 50-50 mixture of the two. The fructose, which is almost twice as sweet as glucose, is what distinguishes sugar from other carbohydrate-rich foods like bread or potatoes that break down upon digestion to glucose alone. The more fructose in a substance, the sweeter it will be.

The American Heart Association has specific guidelines for added sugar – no more than 100 calories a day from added sugar for most women and no more than 150 calories a day for most men. That's about 6 teaspoons of added sugar for women and 9 for men. Most Americans get more than 22 teaspoons – or 355 calories – of added sugar a day, which far exceeds USDA guidelines and American Heart Association recommendations. Please see sidebars for ways to recognize added sugar and how to reduce it in your diet.

By limiting the amount of added sugar you eat, you can cut calories without compromising on nutrition. In fact, cutting back on foods with added sugar and solid fats may make it easier to get the nutrients you need without exceeding your calorie goal. So the next time you're tempted to reach for a sugary drink, grab a glass of water instead.

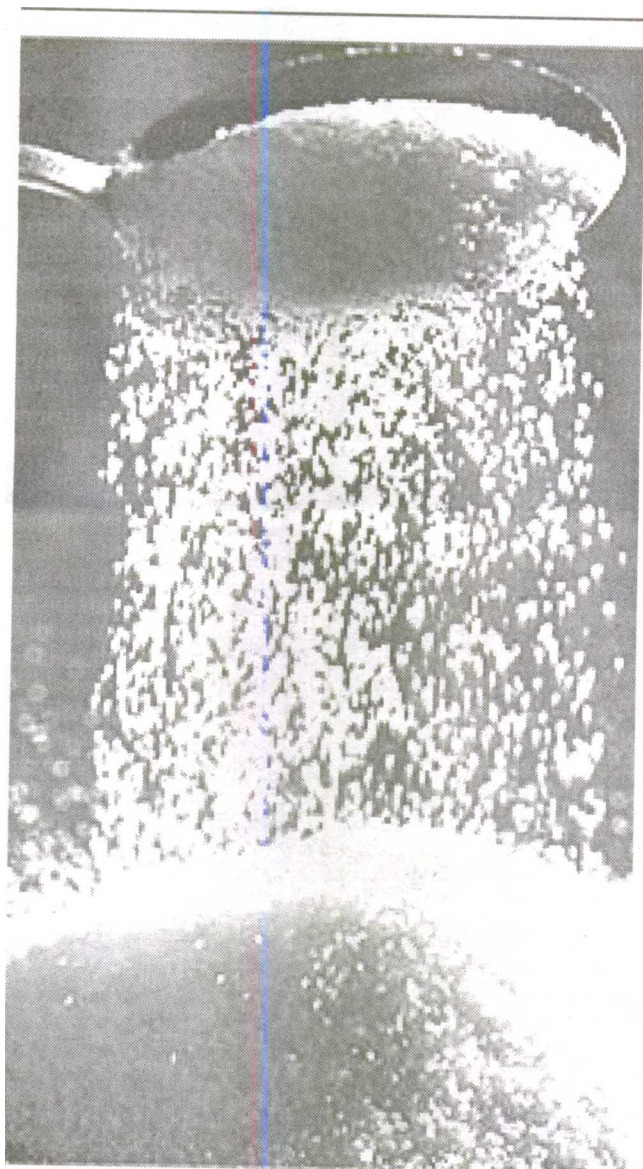
How to reduce added sugar in your diet

If you want to reduce the added sugar in your diet, follow these tips:

- Cut out sugary, nondiet sodas.
- Limit candy, gum and other sweets that are high in added sugar.
- Choose breakfast cereals carefully. Although healthy breakfast cereals can contain added sugar to make them more appealing to children, skip the non-nutritious, sugary and frosted cereals.
- Have fresh fruit for dessert instead of cakes, cookies, pies and other sweets.
- If you choose canned fruit, make sure it's packed in water or juice, not syrup.
- Have your children drink more milk or water and less fruit juice and fruit drinks – and yourself, too. Even though 100 percent fruit juice has a high concentration of natural sugar, drinking too much juice can add unwanted calories.
- Eat fewer added-sugar processed foods, such as sweetened grains like honey-nut waffles and some microwaveable meals.
- Go easy on the condiments – sugar is added to salad dressings and ketchup.
- Opt for reduced-sugar varieties of syrups, jams, jellies and preserves.
- Be aware that dairy-based desserts and processed milk products, such as ice cream and sweetened yogurt, can contain lots of added sugar.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened tea and blended coffee drinks with flavored syrup, sugar and sweet toppings.
- Snack on vegetables, fruit, low-fat cheese, whole-grain crackers, and low-fat, low-calorie yogurt instead of candy, pastries and cookies.

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Recognizing added sugar

If you're not sure which foods and beverages contain added sugar, don't despair. First, know that among the biggest culprits behind excessive amounts of added sugar are soft drinks and sugary fruit drinks. Ways to spot added sugar:

Check the list of ingredients. Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. So if you see sugar listed among the first few ingredients, the product might be high in added sugar. Know that sugar goes by many different names, though — it may not be easy to spot added sugar even in the ingredient list. And natural sugars generally aren't included in the ingredient list.

Read the label. The Nutrition Facts label is required to list an item's total amount of sugar per serving. However, it doesn't distinguish between added sugar and naturally occurring sugar. Some, but not all, packages also state whether an item is sugar-free or contains no added sugar. But be aware that some sugar-free products may contain sugar substitutes, and some of these substitutes can cause stomach or digestive upset. Different names for added sugar

Sugar goes by many different names, depending on its source and how it was made. This can make it confusing to identify added sugar, even when you read ingredient lists and food labels.

One easy way: Check for ingredients ending in "ose" — that's the chemical name for many types of sugar, such as fructose. There's no nutritional advantage for honey, brown sugar, fruit juice concentrate, or other type of sugar over white sugar.

The experts agree

- Dr. Lustig is in good company. Many other experts are frightened by the country's massive consumption of sugar, including: Endocrinologist Dr. David Ludwig, author of "Is America Too Sweet on Sugar"
- Dr. Walter Willett of Harvard, Fredrick John Stare Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition and Chair of the Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health
- Dr. Nancy Appleton, author of "Suicide by Sugar: A Startling Look at Our #1 National Addiction"
- Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, author of "Beat Sugar Addiction Now!"
- Dr. Richard Johnson, author of "The Sugar Fix: The High-Fructose Fallout That is Making You Fat and Sick"
- Connie Bennett, author of "Sugar Shock! How Sweet and Simple Carbs Can Derail Your Life — and How You Can Get Back on Track"