

SUGAR YOUR SWEETIES

Candies, Cakes and Cookies—Oh, my!

Dessert and sweetened snack foods seem to be everywhere we turn. And many parents wonder, **how much sugar is too much?**

Relax, sugar is not a legal poison out to kill our kids. It's normal, and dare I say—healthy—to include some sweet things in your child's diet.

Their long-term health isn't going to be harmed by a slice of birthday cake or two chocolate chip cookies as an after school snack each week. Learning that sweets can be part of a balanced diet is beneficial. But, the reality is that kids are getting way too much sugar in their daily diet.



FACTS ON SUGAR

Let's review the facts on sugar, where it comes from and make some sense of the science.

ADDED versus NATURAL SUGARS

Added sugars are sugars that are added to foods during processing.

For most children, the main sources of added sugars come from sugar-sweetened beverages (including soda, sports drinks and fruit drinks), yogurt, baked goods, desserts, and candy.

Natural sugars are sugars that are an intrinsic part of whole foods.

Milk, fruit, vegetables and grains have some natural sugars.

Your body doesn't distinguish the difference between added and natural sugars. The best piece of advice I can give you is to **simply eat less sugar**, with whole fruit as a notable exception to this rule. Whole fruit comes in a full package containing fiber, vitamins and minerals—and great taste. So get plenty of it.

DAILY SUGAR

25 grams or 6 teaspoons is the daily limit for total sugar (that's natural plus added). When you look at a food label keep this in mind:

Every 4 grams of sugar equals 1 teaspoon.

REWARDING WITHOUT SUGAR

Instead of candy as a reward, try stickers or strips. In our house, we have a “strip chart.” Strips are thin strips of laminated, colored construction paper. When the kids earn 3 strips they get to choose a song for Alexa to play. When they earn 10 strips they can put a decal on their bedroom wall. They can also lose strips for poor choices (which is why we like strips more than stickers—you can't take a sticker away).

UP THE ANTE

For extra special rewards, make **Super Strips**. These are just larger pieces of the same construction paper with the letters S-U-P-E-R on top. When my boys earn 3 super strips, they can choose a 30-minute TV show. 5 Super Strips and they can pick out a toy from the bargain bin at Target.

As you can see, there are many ways to reward your children without linking sugar to good behavior. Get as creative as you like and share your ideas!

BIG PICTURE

Health professionals like me are most concerned with limiting the amount of added sugar in your family's diet. Less added sugar is better for everyone's health, not just the littles!

REMEMBER

The joy of eating should be geared toward the process of satisfying hunger and spending time with family. Children can't choose a well-balanced diet. But adults can, and should—right from the beginning.

Filling up on sugary treats leaves less room in young tummies for heart-healthy fare like fruits, veggies, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. Save these for specific occasions.

