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Sugar Recommendations

How much sugar do you eat in a day? If you're like the average American, you are consuming a whopping 22 teaspoons (~92 grams) of *added sugars* each day! According to the American Heart Association (AHA), this is far too much, and it increases our risk for many cardiovascular disease risk factors.

This is why, in a publication released just last week, the AHA significantly tightened its recommendations related to eating added sugars.

Added sugars can be found in many places, some more obvious than others. You will see them listed on a food label as things like corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, maltose, or honey. While we are probably all aware of the sugar we add into our coffee or cereal, we may not know how much sugar is already in many common beverages, baked goods, and even some yogurts and granola. Next time you reach for a fat-free product take a quick look at the label—many are using sugars to replace the flavor of the fat!

While the previous guidelines were simply to limit consumption, or eat in moderation, the new recommendations provide precise limits based on an individual's age, sex, and activity level. These limits allow most men up to 9 teaspoons (~38 grams) and most women up to 6 teaspoons (~25 grams) per day.

Though not directly linked to heart disease, added sugars have been linked to many risk factors such as weight gain and obesity, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, and high levels of C-reactive protein.

Does this mean we need to go home and cleanse our cupboards of everything that has the word 'sugar' on it? Not necessarily. Sugar can, and should be part of a well-balanced diet—and is certainly not the enemy. The major problem, and the point of these new recommendations is that many of us simply eat too many foods with added sugars, and they are taking the place of more nutrient-rich foods that we could be eating.

The main culprit is soft drinks and other sweetened beverages. In fact, one can of soda contains up to 11 teaspoons of added sugar, nearly double the amount recommended for most women for an entire day! Other beverages, like 100% juice and milk, still contain natural sugars—but also have many vitamins and minerals as well.

Are you getting too much added sugar? Take a look at the labels of foods you commonly eat, you might be getting more than you think. For further information on the new recommendations for added sugars, you can visit the AHA's website at www.americanheart.org. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*