

# How much sugar is too much?

By: Carla Basiliere

We have reached “the holidays” – that time from Halloween to New Year’s when pretty much everyone sees a spike in their intake of added sugar. It comes from Halloween candy, Thanksgiving pies and Christmas cookies. It’s part of the celebration of the season.

But added sugar – sugars and syrups that are removed from their original sources and added to food and beverages when they are processed – can have a negative impact on your health. It can lead to a range of chronic diseases, including obesity, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and tooth decay, and can impair cognitive [brain function](#).

Sugar operates in similar ways to a drug. When you crave sugar, your brain activates the reward pathway, excreting dopamine. Acting on your craving by eating sugar generates feelings of pleasure, producing a “sugar high.” This reaction makes kicking the sugar habit difficult once you start, since most people start consuming sugar in childhood. Positive memories of sugary treats are another trigger, potentially creating a cycle of addiction.

Another part of the problem is the quantity of sugar consumed. An American Heart Association [study](#) attributed 180,000 annual deaths worldwide — 25,000 in the United States — to sugar-sweetened beverages. According to the AHA, Americans eat between 22 and 30 teaspoons of added sugar each day, far above the recommended daily amount of added sugar.

How much sugar is too much? The AHA recommends no more than six teaspoons (25 grams) of added sugar per day for women and nine teaspoons (38 grams) for men. Limits for children vary depending on their age and caloric needs but should range between three to six teaspoons (12 – 25 grams) per day. No more than 10% of an adult’s calories should come from added sugar or natural sugars (honey, syrups or fruit juice).

Here are some [tips](#) to help manage your sugar intake:

1. **Eat a healthy diet.** Include more fruits, vegetables, legumes, lean meats, nuts and whole grains in your diet. These are the best sources of nutrition for your body, along with [low-glycemic foods](#), which raise your blood sugar more slowly. When you choose these foods, your craving for sugar will decrease. Don’t try to give up sugar all at once, simply integrate more healthy food into your diet.
2. **Avoid keeping sugary treats in the house.** Don’t stock candy, cookies, and other high-sugar foods in your cupboards and fridge. Keep fruit available as a substitute.
3. **Choose substitutes.** Sugar substitutes can be added to food to provide sweetness without calories. Some substitutes are stevia sweeteners, or sugar alcohols like sorbitol and xylitol.
4. **Change the way you consume sugar.** Don’t drink your sugar. Eliminate or cut down on intake of soda and juices, switching to water. Instead of juices, eat a piece of fruit. This will also add to your fiber intake.

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Wishing you joy and good health,  
Mary Bohlen RN  
[SJParishNurse@comcast.net](mailto:SJParishNurse@comcast.net)