



Five Ways to Kick Excess Sugar and Embrace a Healthier You!

It is so easy these days to unknowingly consume a majority of our diet in the form of ultra-processed foods. I don't remember seeing candy bars and cookies at the hardware store when I was growing up, but now snack foods are available 24/7 at most stores, gas stations and venues.

Despite best intentions, there are challenges to making healthier food choices! Did you know that manufacturers spend millions of dollars employing food scientists to make convenience foods hyper-palatable, meaning they taste so good our brain wants more of them? And typically these foods are made with the cheapest products available which can have detrimental consequences on our health.

Researchers have found that sugar is one of the top contributors to poor health. Regular sugar consumption has been linked to an increased likelihood of weight gain, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, depression, accelerated skin aging, cellular aging, declining energy and fatty liver disease.

If you want to upgrade your food choices for better health and energy, try some or all of the tips below!

Skip the added sugar- Step one is to look at the nutrition labels in your pantry. While it's no surprise that cookies typically have a lot of sugar, cereals and crackers can be surprisingly high in sugar as well. For instance, one popular brand of crackers that I pulled from the shelf had five different types of sugar listed (sugar, molasses, fructose, brown sugar syrup and honey). If you are like most homes, your pantry is filled with these types of foods. My recommendation: either give the food away or dispose of it.

Read the labels- Although it may take some extra time at the grocery store, make a point to look at the ingredient and nutrition label on all packaged food before you bring

it home. For example, popular yogurt brands can vary from 2 grams to almost 30 grams of sugar per serving. Sugar can be lurking in unexpected items including soups, pasta sauces and nut butters.

Don't forget liquid sugar-I grew up drinking a huge glass of orange juice every morning, thinking it was a health drink. Now I know better. Fruit juices are typically swimming with sugar, (an 8 ounce glass of orange juice has 20 grams of sugar) as are sodas, many sports drinks, frozen coffee drinks and cocktails. While often times considered a snack, a Starbucks Frappuccino has 60 grams of sugar.

Avoid artificial sweeteners- For dedicated calorie counters looking to lose weight it is tempting to replace real sugar with one of the many forms of artificial sweeteners on the market today. If the food or drink has "zero calories" then it must not be bad for us, right? According to researchers at Harvard Medical School, "numerous small studies have hinted at potential health problems, including a higher risk of cancer, kidney disease, and heart disease. Now, a large study has found a potential link between artificial sweeteners and an increased risk of strokes, heart attacks, and related cardiovascular problems". If possible, wean yourself off of any artificial sweetener. You can train your taste buds to enjoy foods that are not exceedingly sweet!

Prioritize whole, real food-Fresh fruits, vegetables, sources of animal and plant protein, nuts, seeds and spices should make up the majority of your diet. Foods found in their natural state do not have added sugars, chemicals or preservatives and typically are not in a box with a barcode. These foods are the foundation of good health fueling you for optimal energy, health and longevity.

Finally- Food is meant to be pleasurable and often brings people together. Using the tips above, see if you can enjoy treats in moderation while making whole foods the main focus of your nutrition plan.