



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Sugar Incognito

Learn to identify various sugars on a food label.

by Allison Jorgens, P.H.Ec.

Many processed foods are laden with sugar adding surplus calories to today's meals. Soft drinks, fruit juice beverages, confectionary products, baked goods, breakfast cereals, and yogurt can all be culprits of calorie overload due to sugar.

High caloric intake is a known contributor to obesity and Canadian waistlines continue to expand. The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) reports that the rate of obesity in Canada is close to 25%.

Currently, there is insufficient scientific evidence upon which to recommend limits on sugar intake. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult for Canadians to gauge – *how much is too much?*

Food labels present additional challenges that are far from sweet:

- ✓ Many different names identify added sugars. Some are more obvious, such as brown sugar and icing sugar, however, many are unassuming such as barley malt, evaporated cane juice, and agave nectar;
- ✓ The total amount of sugars on the Nutrition Facts table does not differentiate between 'naturally occurring' sugars (i.e. sugars found in fruit, vegetables and milk) and 'added' sugars. Foods that contain 'added' sugars are typically higher in fat and/or calories and lower in nutrients than foods containing naturally occurring sugars.

Shopping tips to help you identify sugars on labels:

- ✓ Look for ingredient names that actually incorporate the word 'sugar' (i.e. liquid sugar, invert sugar, brown sugar, golden sugar);
- ✓ Realize that ingredient names ending in 'ose' indicate sugars too (i.e. glucose, sucrose, fructose, glucose-fructose, lactose, sugar/glucose-fructose);
- ✓ Note that honey, molasses, maple syrup and corn syrup are added to flavour, colour, and also, sweeten foods;
- ✓ Be advised that 'concentrated fruit juice' also adds flavour and colour, however, it is a significant source of sugar;
- ✓ Beware of the ingredient names 'glucose-fructose' and 'sugar/glucose-fructose' that are typically used in Canada for high fructose corn syrup;

- ✓ Keep in mind that although cane sugar and organic cane sugar may sound more enticing, both contain 4 calories per gram – same as regular sugar;
- ✓ Look for the claim ‘No Sugar Added’ to indicate a food is void of added sugars and ingredients that have been added to sweeten a food such as molasses, honey and maple syrup. Note that the claim ‘Unsweetened’ indicates a product meets the requirements for the claim ‘No Sugar Added’ and does not contain artificial sweeteners*;
- ✓ Shop and compare. ‘Reduced in-’ and ‘Lower in-sugar’ claims indicate that a food contains at least 25% less sugar and at least 5 grams less sugar than a similar food which could be very high in sugar. Always compare the amount of sugars declared in the Nutrition Facts Table of each food for more information and analysis.

Too much to swallow? Two tips to help:

Until scientific evidence evolves to support a recommended limit on sugar consumption suitable for all age groups and wide range of consumers in Canada, this simple equation may help to put sugars into perspective:

1. Divide the amount of sugars in grams declared on the Nutrition Facts Table by 4 to determine the equivalent number of teaspoons of sugar in each serving.

Consider the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) recommendations for limiting the amount of added sugars you consume daily:

2. The AHA recommends average women limit added sugar consumption to about 6 teaspoons a day (24 grams), and average men limit added sugar consumption to about 9 teaspoons a day (36 grams).

*Note – Fruit spreads prepared from concentrated fruit juices that are added as fruit ingredients vs sweetening ingredients will contain a sweetener when the ‘No Sugar Added’ claim is displayed.

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Allison Jorgens is a Professional Home Economist based in Ontario’s York Region. She has been working as a food label/regulatory affairs specialist for Canadian food companies for over a decade. Allison is a member of the Ontario Home Economics Association.

Ontario Home Economics Association (OHEA), a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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