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REDUCING SUGAR IN YOUR DIET CAN RESULT IN WEIGHT LOSS, INCREASED ENERGY, AND A HEALTHIER YOU

By: Dave Kraybill, Executive Director, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation

The notion of having to cut sugar from your diet seems extreme—you don't eat *that* much sugar. It's not like you eat donuts everyday for breakfast or dessert after every meal. You don't even touch candy bars except for those rare occasions that they call out to you at the convenience store. And you buy sugar-free items when available. So just where IS the excess sugar that you should consider cutting from your diet?

If this is the way you think about your sugar intake, that's probably the first question you may want to ask yourself. Do you eat spaghetti sauce? Canned soup? Do you drink those fancy coffee drinks or regular soda? Do you use salad dressing? Ketchup? Mustard? Do you eat bread or crackers? Yes? Well, you are consuming *added* sugar. In fact, it is nearly impossible to avoid sugar in your diet. All foods, unless you only eat meat and drink water, contain sugar. The amount of sugar America eats has soared nearly 30 percent since 1983 and is a major contributor to obesity, osteoporosis, heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Americans consume on average 34 teaspoons of sugar per day, more than triple the USDA recommended daily intake of 10 teaspoons (4 grams of sugar equal one teaspoon). This recommended daily intake does not include naturally occurring sugars found in fruits and dairy products.

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate and carbohydrates are present in any food that comes from plants—fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes. Carbohydrates are our primary energy source so you cannot eliminate them from your diet, it is just important to be eating the right kind. Empty carbohydrates contain little or no fiber, vitamins or minerals—soda, cookies, cakes—foods high in sugar. Healthy carbohydrates are the opposite; they have minerals, vitamins, fiber and antioxidants—fruits, vegetables, milk, yogurt, and legumes. When a food item is labeled “sugar-free” or “no added sugar” it means that the product has had no *added sugar* during processing, however foods may naturally contain significant amounts of sugar.

Why is sugar so addictive? When you consume sugar your body increases its production of insulin. This increase can be drastic and fast because your body works hard to regulate the influx and it does this through insulin production. The insulin dispatches the sugar from your system quickly, but in the process your body's overall insulin levels drop drastically. These low levels of insulin create a craving for sugar because that will give your body the quickest relief. So the cycle begins—you eat sugar, your body spikes insulin to compensate, your sugar levels become too low for the amount of insulin in your body, your body creates a sugar craving, you eat sugar.

How to Identify Hidden Sugars

By now, you can see why reducing your sugar intake will result in a healthier you! But figuring out how much sugar you are eating can seem daunting, especially since sugar is disguised under many names. The first thing to do check your nutrition labels, but know that the sugar grams listed lumps all sugars together including naturally-occurring milk and fruit sugars which we know can be deceiving. To determine how much sugar has been added to a product, learn to identify terms listed *under the ingredients* that mean “added sugar” such as table sugar, brown sugar, powdered sugar, cane sugar, molasses, beet sugar, Turbinado sugar, corn syrup, sorghum, maple syrup, honey, glucose, sucrose, dextrose, lactose, maltose, fructose, Sorbitol, Xylitol, Mannitol, Maltitol. By recognizing these sugar names in disguise you can immediately see that sugar has been “added” to the food item.

Ways to Wean Yourself Off Sugar

So, where do you begin? First, start cutting down slowly. If you put two teaspoons of sugar in your coffee

or tea, just put one and a half in and slowly reduce the amount weekly. Slow and steady reduction is the best way to break the cycle and tame that sweet tooth. Establish rules about dessert. Only eat a dessert after dinner, not lunch. Or only eat dessert on the weekends or at restaurants. Instead of drinking sugary-sweet drinks like lemonade or soda, make your own homemade ice tea or better yet drink a refreshing glass of water and add lemon or lime juice for flavor. Consider purchasing reduced sugar condiments at the grocery store—one tablespoon of ketchup contains ½ a teaspoon of sugar—that can add up. Other ideas include:

- Try all-fruit spread, it's as sweet as sugar, but has no added sugar
- Substitute applesauce or pureed prunes for half the sugar in recipes
- Give up sports bars and drinks—they should be called sugar bars and drinks
- Choose a breakfast cereal with 8 grams of sugar or less per serving
- Do not skip meals, it drops your blood sugar and thus increases your craving for sugar
- Do not add sugar to recipes—recipes that call for added sugar usually taste fine without it
- Go for a walk when you crave sweetness, your preference for sweets declines after exercise

Eliminating sugar completely from your diet is unrealistic, however taking small steps to reduce your intake and work toward consuming the recommended 10 teaspoons a day is realistic. The best way to consume less is to become aware of how much you are consuming. By consciously eating less sugar you will be delighted with the results—you'll feel better, lose weight, and reduce your risk for obesity, diabetes, cancer and heart disease. Now that's sweet.

About the Foundation The Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation's mission is to enhance the health and wellness of area residents, providing education, funding and programs that motivate people to adopt healthy lifestyles.

Commit to Mission: Good Nutrition In support of the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation's goal to promote healthy living and healthy lifestyles, the Foundation sponsors the *Mission Good Nutrition* program, which airs every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. on PCTV Channel 28. Tune in and discover nutritional ideas you can use immediately and benefit from every day. *Mission: Good Nutrition* is an entertaining educational show designed to motivate, encourage and empower individuals to continue developing healthier dietary habits. Go to "Mission: Good Nutrition" at www.pottstownfoundation.org for recipes featured on the program, video clips, fitness tips and quizzes.