Sane talk about sugar

What is sugar? Is it bad for you? Good for you? There is much confusion. Below is a U.S. Dietary Guideline on sugar, reprinted with comment by General Foods.

Sugars are simple carbohydrates that are used by your body for energy and to maintain proper metabolism. Most of the foods you eat every day have some form of sugar in them, and many of these foods are richly endowed with other nutrients.

Even so, the use of sugars can be abused.

Here is what the Guideline advises:

1. The major health hazard from sugars is tooth decay. Prevailing scientific evidence indicates that sugars do not seem to cause diabetes or heart disease or blood vessel disease, as some people believe.

2. The problem of tooth decay from sugars stems not just from how much you eat, but how frequently and in what form you eat the sugars. Sticky foods eaten between meals are particularly bad because they stay on your teeth longer.

3. Proper dental hygiene and fluoride are also important in fighting tooth decay.

4. Sugars from many sources can cause tooth decay. It is not limited to white sugar in the sugar bowl. Honey, raw sugar, brown sugar and syrups are sugar sources regarded by some people as blameless because they are "natural." Not so. Sugars from these sources can cause cavities just as readily as sugar from the sugar bowl. It's *how* the sugar is eaten that counts.

5. The Guideline is not suggesting that you eliminate sugar from your diet. You're being advised to avoid eating too much of it. Here's how:

Eat a variety of all foods. The list should include carbohydrate foods such as vegetables, breads, fruits, products made from grains and cereals that contain other nutrients as well as sugar. Eat a proper selection from all the food groups, and you will get the vitamins and minerals you need each day, plus the carbohydrates your body uses for energy.

Balance your diet. Make sure you eat plenty of carbohydrate foods. But don't overdo those sugars that come without other nutrients. Lower your intake of fatty foods as you switch to carbohydrates. And eat adequate amounts of protein.

Eat everything, but moderately. Eat too much of *any* food, including sugar, and you're on your way to problems associated with being overweight.

Gauge your energy requirements, and adjust your calorie intake accordingly. Remember, an ounce of sugar contains the same calories as an ounce of starch or protein in foods. And fats contain more than twice the calories of each.

Read the U.S. Dietary Guideline below. It is one of seven Guidelines that General Foods is reprinting for your study. They are: 1. Eat a variety of foods. 2. Maintain ideal weight. 3. Avoid too much fat, saturated fat and cholesterol. 4. Eat foods with adequate starch and fiber. 5. Avoid too much sugar. 6. Avoid too much sodium. 7. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.

Watch for our reprint of "Avoid too much sodium" soon.

1. What are the various kinds of sugar? Sugars are simple carbohydrates found in various forms in a wide variety of foods. We're most familiar with table sugar, which comes from sugar cane or beets. This same sugar, called "sucrose," is also in fruits, and even in vegetables and grains.

In addition to sucrose, sugars common in foods include fructose, found in many fruits. And lactose, found in milk. And glucose, found in corn and other vegetables. In fact, at least 21 kinds of sugars occur naturally in foods.

2. What is the major risk from eating sugar? The only proven risk is tooth decay. And the risky part may not really be how *much* you eat, but how *often* the sugar is in contact with your teeth, in what *form* and for how *long*.

Cavities, or dental caries, are the result of these interacting elements: sugar and other forms of carbohydrates, tooth enamel, bacteria, and plaque. Certain bacteria produce plaque on the teeth, setting the stage for cavities. Bacteria in the plaque convert carbohydrates into acid that attacks tooth enamel.

Remove carbohydrates from this scene, and bacteria have nothing to feed on. This is why sticky foods are the riskiest kind.

3. Do beverages cause tooth decay? If you drink moderate amounts of sugar-containing beverages, there should be no problem because of the short time these drinks remain in your mouth. But don't sip sweetened beverages or fruit juices all day long.

4. Are there other ways to fight cavities aside from eating sweets less often? There is no substitute for good oral hygiene. Brush your teeth after every meal. Use floss to be sure no food remains trapped between teeth. If you can, brush every time you eat sticky sweets. If you can't brush, rinse.

No matter how well you brush or floss, you need to go to the dentist for regular check-ups and cleanings, to remove plaque that you can neither see nor reach.

Finally, realize the importance of fluoride. The U.S. Surgeon General reports that children raised on fluoridated water have *two-thirds less cavities* than those without this benefit. If you aren't sure that your family is getting enough fluoride, consult your dentist.

5. Does sugar play a role in diabetes or heart trouble? Diabetes occurs most frequently in obese adults, and these people are also at high risk of having more heart attacks. Most scientists agree that sugar plays no direct role in diabetes or heart trouble, but that being obese does. It's excess calories, not sugar itself, that leads to obesity.

5 Avoid Too Much Sugar (1)

(2) The major health hazard from eating too much sugar is tooth decay (dental caries). The risk of caries is not simply a matter of how much sugar you eat. The risk increases the more frequently you eat sugar and sweets, especially if you eat between meals, and if you eat foods that stick to the teeth.

For example, frequent snacks of sticky candy, or dates, or daylong use of soft drinks (3) may be more harmful than adding sugar to your morning cup of coffee—at least as far as your teeth are concerned.

Obviously, there is more to healthy teeth (4) than avoiding sugars. Careful dental hygiene and exposure to adequate amounts of fluoride in the water are especially important.

Contrary to widespread opinion, too much (5) sugar in your diet does not seem to cause diabetes. The most common type of diabetes is seen in obese adults, and avoiding sugar, without correcting the overweight, will not solve the problem. There is also no convincing evidence that sugar causes heart attacks or blood vessel diseases.

Estimates indicate that Americans use on the average more than 130 pounds of sugars and sweeteners a year. This means the risk of tooth decay is increased not only by the (6) sugars in the sugar bowl but by the sugars and syrups in jams, jellies, candies, cookies, soft drinks, cakes, and pies, as well as sugars found in products such as breakfast cereals, (7) catsup, flavored milks, and ice cream. Frequently, the ingredient label will provide a clue to the amount of sugars in a product.

To avoid excessive sugars

(8) • Use less of all sugars, including white sugar, brown sugar, raw sugar, honey, and syrups

• Eat less of foods containing these sugars, such as candy, soft drinks, ice cream, cakes, cookies

• Select fresh fruits or fruits canned without sugar or light syrup rather than heavy syrup

• Read food labels for clues on sugar content (9) —if the names sucrose, glucose, maltose, dextrose, lactose, fructose, or syrups appear first, then there is a large amount of sugar

• Remember, how often you eat sugar is as important as how much sugar you eat

Note: Numbers and underlinings are for editorial comment by General Foods

6. Is sugar that nature put there better than the sugar that is added to food? Many people think that naturally occurring sugar is better than added sugar. It's not. Fruits and honey contain both sucrose (table sugar) and other kinds of sugars. Your body appears to use all these sugars in much the same way, whether they come from nature or are added to food by man.

7. Are sugars in packaged food products such as breakfast cereals, catsup, flavored milks and ice cream more cavity-causing than sugars in other foods? As far as cavities are concerned, the form of the food and the pattern of consumption are what's important. Those foods that clear the mouth quickly, especially those eaten at mealtime or with liquid, aren't likely to be a special problem. For instance, dental studies show that cereals, including pre-sweetened cereals, do not increase risk of cavities.

8. What's the difference between white sugar, raw sugar, and brown sugar? The term "raw sugar" is very misleading. First, you can't buy truly raw sugar. Second, commercially available "raw" sugar is partially refined. Third, brown sugar isn't raw at all. It's refined sugar coated with molasses.

Sugar is refined in order to remove dirt and other impurities. Refining does remove minute traces of certain nutrients, but these are not nutritionally significant when you eat a balanced diet.

9. How do you read a food label to tell about the sugar in a product? By law, labels must list ingredients by weight: Heaviest first, lightest last. Generally, each ingredient must be listed separately. Various kinds of sugars, for example, cannot be grouped on the label, nor can grains. When you're reading a label, remember: • Sugar content of foods as you eat them is what is important. Listing of sugar by weight in dry mix products, such as pudding or beverage mixes, is not a true indication of the amount of sugar present as the product is used when water or milk is added. • Sugar is quite dense, and therefore takes up less space than most other ingredients in a product. For example, when you read a pre-sweetened cereal label, sugars often rank high in the ingredient list by weight, but actually the sugar takes up only a small proportion of the cereal in the bowl or in the box. • If a product contains more than one type of sugar or grain, each type is listed separately in order by its weight. However, the total of each group is not shown.

General Foods urges you to study the U.S. Dietary Guidelines