

Being sugar savvy:

understanding natural versus added sugars

By That Sugar Movement

There is a lot of talk in the world of health and nutrition about sugar, and for good reason.

Studies show a diet high in added or free sugar can be linked to poor concentration; impaired performance associated with learning and memory; mental health, mood and behaviour concerns; and increased risk for tooth decay, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. Not ideal!

Yet many of us have no idea just how much added sugar we are consuming.

At [That Sugar Movement](#), we want individuals to be aware of the risks of eating too much added sugar, and to be empowered to make good food decisions by gaining an understanding of the sweet stuff.

This includes knowing the difference between naturally occurring sugars and added or free sugars.



Natural versus added sugars

First, what are sugars? Broadly, sugars are soluble, sweet-tasting carbohydrates.

Two common simple sugars are glucose and fructose and the body processes each of these differently.

Sugars come from a wide variety of sources, both natural and added.

Naturally occurring simple sugars, including glucose, fructose and lactose, are intrinsic to whole foods such as fruit, vegetables and dairy.



Added and free sugars are those added to foods or drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, generally to sweeten or preserve, and are those naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates.

Naturally occurring, intrinsic sugars are metabolised differently than those considered added or free sugars, with a very different impact on the body.

Naturally occurring sugars in fruit and vegetables are packaged with fibre, other nutrients, and water. This slows down sugar absorption into the blood, lessening its impact on blood glucose levels and the liver.

Free and added sugars, on the other hand, are absorbed rapidly and can illicit damaging health effects when consumed in excess. This is regardless of whether the sugary source is considered less processed (e.g., juice) or more processed (e.g., golden syrup). To the body, a free sugar is a free sugar!

A little is okay

Despite some being convinced that ANY source of sugar is bad for health, the body and brain require a little sugar for everyday function.

But we must be conscious of *where* we obtain sugar in our diet.

Any sugar we need to function we can get from whole foods, such as vegetables and fruit. Anything added or free is not necessary, and in excess can be detrimental.

While we do not require added or free sugar for everyday function, if you are going to have some, limit intake to 6 teaspoons (25g) of added and free sugars per day, as [recommended by the World Health Organization](#) for health benefits.

And if you are going to have a little, choose a less processed option, with the long-term goal to limit intake overall.

Be savvy on sugar

Becoming sugar smart will help you to make healthier food choices, balance blood glucose levels and maintain energy throughout the day.

Generally, if you aim to reduce intake of processed and packaged foods - especially those high in added sugars and heavily refined grains - and consume mostly real, whole food, you will inadvertently consume less of the sweet stuff.

A good thing to keep in mind is a little added sugar is okay for most. Abstaining altogether in the long-term can be difficult. The last thing we want is for someone to be too hard on oneself if they have a slice of grandma's birthday cake!

Instead, enjoy it for what it is and have something nutritious at your next meal.

