

How much **SUGAR** does a jacket potato contain?

A surprising six spoonfuls! Discover the hidden sugars in your diet – and why fizzy drinks aren't the only sugar shockers



How often do you buy a bag of sugar? Chances are, these days, it's not that often. Most of us are proud of the fact that we no longer take sugar in our coffee or tea. Yet most of us are consuming far more sugar today than we did 30 years ago. The big increase is in hidden sugar that the food industry is sneaking into the processed foods we buy. But starchy foods, such as baked potatoes, can be a problem, too.

Now, an American doctor, Robert Lustig, is calling for sugary foods and drinks to be subjected to the same strict regulations as alcohol and tobacco. Professor Lustig is campaigning for a sugar tax to see the price of sweets, biscuits and fizzy drinks double in an effort to dissuade us from buying so many of them. He's taken such a strong stance that he has called for fizzy drinks to be banned from sale to under 17s. And, if he gets his way, he could be doing us all a huge favour.

As professor of clinical paediatrics at the University of California, and an expert in childhood obesity, he has seen six-month-old babies who are already obese due to glucose-fructose syrup, added to some US baby formulas. And, with a background in endocrinology – which means he knows all about how our bodies break down food and turn it into energy – he argues that sugar is behind the obesity epidemic and has caused the huge rise in conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease.

SUGAR ALERT

'Studies show that a processed, junk-food diet is right up there with smoking and alcohol as a danger to our health,' explains Kath Dalmeny of Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming. Despite what we think about fat in food damaging our health, it's sugar that is the true demon, believes obesity researcher Zoe Harcombe. 'Since the 1970s, the food industry has cut back on fat and given us low-fat options for just

about everything – but where they've taken the fat out, they have added in sugar (for flavour) – for example, in low-fat yoghurts (which may contain up to six teaspoons of sugar).

Avoid breads, soups, sauces, dressings and ready meals that are packed with added sugar. Check your vitamin tablets and even your sausages!

“Most of us consume far more sugar than we did 30 years ago”

Don't be surprised to see some form of sugar, such as dextrose or fructose, on the list of ingredients, says Zoe. 'Sugar has found its way into virtually every processed food on the market,' she says. 'Why? Because it's a cheap filler, it prolongs shelf life, and it appeals to the human sweet tooth. Forget that we're supposed to eat food for its nutritional content – sugar is added for any reason

other than because it makes a product healthy. Even SlimFast shakes are 62 per cent sugar!

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR SWEET TOOTH

According to Professor Lustig, sugar programmes us to eat more by switching off the satiety hormone, leptin, which tells us we're full. There's a biological reason for this; when we were hunter-gatherers, we binged on sweet fruit at harvest time when there was an abundance of it, and that made up for the lack of fruit during winter.

But sugar in processed food is an anti-nutrient because it takes nutrients to digest it, and gives us nothing in return, says Zoe. 'Whereas we need fat and would eventually die without any in our diet, we need only 1tsp of sugar in our blood at any time and even a large apple will give us five times as much as that.'

The problem is that it's hard to give sugar up – and that makes it very easy for marketing people to persuade us to eat more of it.

'We all have an innate love of sugar,' says Kath. 'And nowadays, we're surrounded by sugary foods, with sweet "treats" popping up to tempt us. And

now high-sugar fizzy drinks are coming back in many schools – in the same vending machines that parents spent years campaigning to have banned – after education secretary Michael Gove said that the rules for national nutritional standards do not apply to the academy status schools that over a million children now attend. This is a big step in the wrong direction, says Kath. 'The UK already has the highest consumption of sugary drinks and processed foods in Europe, and we tend to follow the US, where obesity is an epidemic,' she says.

THE DIABETES TIME BOMB

















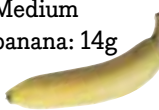





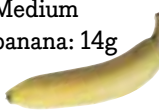







The ingredients label tells only half the story, says nutritional therapist Judy Watson (www.judywatsonnutritionist.co.uk). 'When we eat a high-starch or -sugar diet we can suffer mood swings or a type of depression known as atypical depression, which may lead our doctor to prescribe antidepressants. If the cycle continues, your body will pump out more and more insulin, resulting in weight gain, which contributes to the huge rise in type 2 diabetes.'

HOW IT ALL ADDS UP

Glass of orange juice + Kellogg's Crunchy Nut = 44g	Mid-morning Nutri-Grain Elevenses bar = 18g
Sandwich + can of cola + smoky-bacon crisps = 43g	Pasta with Dolmio Sauce for Bolognese = 8.4g

TOTAL: 113.4g (or 28tsp) of sugar

HOW MUCH SUGAR?

ADDED SUGARS		STARCHY SUGARS		NATURAL SUGARS	
Teaspoons		Teaspoons		Teaspoons	
Can of cola: 39g 		Slice of white bread: 8g 		Kiwi fruit: 16g 	
Kellogg's Crunchy Nut: 11g 		Baked potato: 24g 		Large apple: 23g 	
Walkers Smoky Bacon Crisps: 1.1g 		Portion of white pasta: 16g 		Orange juice: 33g 	
Nutri-Grain Elevenses bar: 18g 		Portion of white rice: 24g 		Medium banana: 14g 	
Hovis Wholemeal bread (per slice): 1.6g 		Couscous: 16g 		Strawberries (1 cup): 7g 	

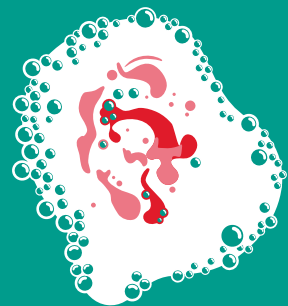
TREAT GUM DISEASE IF YOU HAVE IT



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You should ideally get no more than ten per cent of your daily calories from sugars of all types (such as in jam, honey, fruit, juices etc) – that's around 50g (12½tsp) of sugar a day. But the average UK citizen consumes 26tsp and 400 sugar calories a day – amounting to 38kg of sugar in a year, according to the World Health Organization. 'Even your five a day can be sugar loaded,' says Judy Watson. 'Choose vegetables and salads over fruit, which contains far more sugar.'

ALTERNATIVE SWEETENERS

Beware of diet fizzy drinks – they're sweetened with aspartame, which increases sugar cravings and reduces levels of the brain chemical, serotonin, so you get moody and hungry, warns Judy. 'Weaning yourself off added sugar allows you to enjoy the natural sweetness of whole, unprocessed foods. Xylitol is great because it doesn't affect blood sugar levels, mood or weight (but taking more than 2tsp at a time can have a laxative effect). But beware of brands that combine it with other sugars, such as maltodextrin.'

LATEST RESEARCH shows that high-blood sugar leads to extra skin wrinkles. The sugar attaches itself to collagen, which, in turn, turns the collagen brittle, more likely to break and makes it more difficult for the skin to repair itself.

In my case



Even though I thought I had a healthy diet, a couple of years ago, I was tired and lethargic. Nutritional therapist Judy Watson reviewed everything I ate – and concluded I was consuming far too much sugar. The bananas and cereal bars I was eating on the run to "keep me going" were loaded with sugar. Cutting these out gave me withdrawal headaches at first, but then one day, after about two months, I felt as if I'd got all my energy back. I realised that instead of just functioning – going to work and getting back home – I was eager to go out and do other things, too. I felt like I was living again.'

Katie Milton, 42, a theatre producer from London

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