Solution of the control of the contr

news that will keep you from being tempted to indulge too often.

By Elizabeth Somer, M.A., R.D.

When it comes to sugar, there's good news and bad news. First the good: It's not the evil scourge low-carb devotees and sugarphobes claim it is. You don't have to give it up to be healthy or lose weight. "People demonize sugar, but there's nothing wrong with it in reasonable amounts," says John Foreyt, Ph.D., director of the Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. And that brings us to the catch: Chances are, your intake is *not* reasonable, so you *are* going to have to make some adjustments. The average woman eats — ready to be shocked? — 31 teaspoons (nearly ²/₃ cup or 124 grams) of added sugars a day, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Sure, it's no surprise that foods like jelly beans, regular soda and frosted cereals contain sugar. But most people don't realize that many healthy products — from yogurt, whole-wheat bread and chili to pasta sauce, veggie burgers and frozen turkey dinners — give you more than you may need. →

Three ways sugar packs on pounds

What's the big deal? Added sugars include the various forms of sweeteners in packaged goods as well as the sugar you sprinkle on your morning cereal, the honey you stir into your tea or the maple syrup you pour on pancakes. The problem: they supply you with a shocking 496 calories a day. Unlike the sugars naturally found in fruit and other foods like milk, these added sugars have zero vitamins, minerals or fiber.

The take home: If you did nothing else but slash your added sugar intake in half, you'd lose 25 pounds in a year. Yet, you'd still be taking in more than experts think is healthy. Nutritionists say you shouldn't get more than 10 percent of your daily calories from added sugar (and if we're being honest, less is better). That translates to 12 teaspoons (48 grams) for someone eating 2,000 calories a day. An active woman trying to lose weight might be on a 1,500-calorie diet and should have no more than 9 teaspoons (36 grams). Drink just one can of regular cola a day (39 grams of sugar) and you've hit your limit. Wow.

Sugar also triggers weight gain in several ways:

Olt's hidden in many of the foods we love. On food labels, the sugar naturally present in food is lumped together with the added sugars, so you must read the ingredients lists. One reason people consume such a hefty daily dose of sweeteners is that they don't realize that, in addition to sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, brown rice syrup, honey, fruit juice, fructose and molasses are all sources of empty calories. No one form of sugar is healthier than another. If any

kind of sugar is high on the ingredients list, or if there are a few of them sprinkled throughout, you can assume the sugar in that food is mostly added, not natural and that means empty calories.

Sugar often comes packed with fat. Think ice cream, cake, cookies, candy bars - they all contain lots of sugar and cream or butter. "Sugar makes fat taste really good, so you end up eating even more calories in a single sitting because fat has 9 calories per gram, compared to sugar's 4," Foreyt explains.

Sugar portions have exploded.

sugar

factoid:

overweight.

"Sweet foods are part of the supersize trend," says Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D., adjunct assistant professor of nutrition and food studies at New York University and author of The Portion Teller (Morgan Road Books, 2005). "Take soft drinks. Remember the 3-ounce Dixie of sugar and enough cup? Compare healthful foods to meet that with today's your nutrient needs, 64-ounce containchances are you're ers of soda that are

sitting." Sweetened beverages are the biggest contributor of added sugar to our diets and are responsible for half of the 31

How sweets trick your body

It's not just about calories in, calories out. Sugar also changes the way your body processes food.

Sugar has a high glycemic index (GI). This simply means that it's digested quickly. In response, your bloodstream is flooded with glucose (blood sugar), and your pancreas releases a big dose of the hormone insulin to help the cells absorb it so it can be used for energy. That sends glucose levels plunging, giving your brain the signal that it's time to eat again. Sweet treats, like hard candy, jelly beans and soft drinks, have a high GI, as do lowfat cookies and cakes; these contain extra sugar to make up for the lack of fat, plus they're made with refined flour, which also has a high GI. Fat-laden treats, like ice cream, are lower-GI foods because fat delays the release of glucose. But don't get excited yet: They're still loaded with calories, say experts.

Sugar may be linked to diabetes. Products with added sugar in particular have been shown in studies to raise risk of this disease. If you are eating a lot According to an eight-year study by researchers at Harvard, women who increased their intake of sugary beverages from one or fewer

> drinks per week to one per day gained more than 17 pounds over the study period; their diabetes risk climbed by a whopping 80 percent.

> In part, high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), the sweetener used in most soft drinks (as well as in other packaged products), might be to blame. "Compared to table sugar, HFCS adds a stronger jolt of sweetness to soft drinks. That entices us to consume more and, therefore, take in more calories," says George Bray, M.D.,

teaspoons we take in each day.

slurped down in one

WHERE 1/2 cup of chunky SUGAR tomato sauce SNEAKS IN 6 oz. Here are some fruit surprising sources yogurt of added sugar. (Remember, 8 oz. piña 36 grams or less colada a day is a healthy amount.)

chief of the Division of Clinical Obesity and Metabolism at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

The upside of sugar

Why then should we eat any of the stuff? In addition to being one of life's great pleasures, it appears that our love for sugar is inborn. "A preference for sweets is an evolutionary survival mechanism," notes George Armelagos, Ph.D., professor of anthropology at Emory University in Atlanta. "Sweet foods tend to be safe, while bitter foods are more often toxic."

Ever wonder why you turn to brownies, cookies and your co-worker's candy jar when you're under stress? It's not just you. Research suggests that the very taste of sugar on your tongue boosts levels of brain chemicals, endorphins and serotonin, which improve mood and even help calm the nerves. Researchers at the University of Cincinnati recently found that a small daily dose of sugar lowered the stress response of rats when the animals were placed in circumstances designed to make them agitated. Compared to rats not given sugar, the group that got it had 25 percent lower levels of stress hormones called glucocorticoids, which in excessive amounts have been linked to obesity and a weakened immune response.

In another rat study, animals were put on a very restrictive diet then placed in a stressful situation and given access to sugar. The result? They chowed down. The overeating was triggered only by the combination of stress and deprivation; either situation alone did not cause the rats to binge. Of course, rats aren't people, but the lesson from these two studies may be that it's somewhat beneficial to have small amounts of sugar in your diet on a regular basis to help keep your weight in check. If you try to remove every last granule, you may actually be setting yourself up for failure.

De-sugar your diet

We've created a 21-day eating program to show you how easy it is to eat less sugar and lose weight, but still allow yourself a hit of sweetness so you stay satisfied. On the next two pages is a week of menus that will help you keep your added sugar intake below the maximum suggested 10 percent of calories limit. Each day you'll consume 1,500 calories and less than 36 grams of added sugars, the recommended healthy amount.

At the end of week one, start the plan again and follow it for three weeks. Assuming you're also doing a moderate amount of exercise, you should drop weight at the safe rate of about a pound a week. (If you can't lose weight on a 1,500 calories a day, it means you need to increase exercise, not cut calories further.) As with any low-calorie diet, be sure to take a multivitamin/mineral supplement every day. To make things easy for you, we've posted a shopping list you can print out and mini-recipes online at Shape.com/desugar. Anytime you see an asterisk (*) next to a dish, go to the website to get the how-to details.

Finally, don't worry that cutting back on added sweeteners is going to make you feel deprived. This diet has been designed with the true sugar lover in mind. It contains plenty of foods that are naturally sweet, such as fruit, dairy and even some veg

The average person eats

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of added sugar daily.
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etables, like carrots and sweet potatoes. Plus, we've come up with some tricks and techniques that enhance the naturally sweet flavor of foods so they give you even greater satisfaction.

ELIZABETH SOMER, M.A., R.D., is the author of 10 Habits That Mess Up a Woman's Diet (McGraw-Hill., 2005).

