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The average American consumes almost 20 teaspoons of sugar per day. To put that into perspective, it's equivalent to a serving of jelly beans, nine Hershey's Kisses, a couple of Double Stuff Oreos, and a couple of brownies. While this may sound like an extreme indulgence reserved for holidays, the reality is that sugar has sneaked its way into a staggering 75 percent of packaged foods. From breakfast cereals to granola bars, flavored yogurts, soups, breads, and condiments, added sugars have become ubiquitous in our diets, leading us to ingest excessive amounts even when we think we're making healthier choices.

The detrimental effects of added sugars on our health are well-documented. They can disrupt our metabolism, contribute to weight gain, and increase the risk of heart disease, diabetes, tooth decay, acne, and more. To mitigate these risks, it's crucial to understand the impact of different types of sugars and sweeteners on our bodies.

Natural Sugars

Natural sugars, present in foods like yogurt, milk, and fruits, come packaged with essential nutrients such as calcium, magnesium, potassium, and fiber. Unlike added sugars, natural sugars do not pose the same health risks. For instance, the sugars in whole fruits are accompanied by fiber, which slows down sugar absorption and reduces its impact on blood sugar levels. However, it's essential to be mindful of fruit juices, which lack the fiber content of whole fruits and can lead to excessive sugar consumption.

The American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugar intake to 6 teaspoons (25 grams) per day for women and 9 teaspoons (36 grams) per day for men. While a moderate amount of sugar can enhance the flavor of nutritious foods, it's crucial to differentiate between natural sugars and added sugars to make informed dietary choices.

Sugar Awareness

Identifying and reducing added sugars in our diets can be challenging due to the various names they hide behind, such as agave, cane sugar, honey, and high fructose corn syrup. The current food labeling system does not distinguish between naturally occurring sugars and added sugars, making it harder for consumers to make informed decisions. Until the updated labels are implemented, comparing products based on their sugar content and making conscious choices can help reduce sugar intake.

Liquid Dangers

Sugary drinks are a major culprit in our excessive sugar consumption, with nearly half of adults and the majority of children consuming them daily. These beverages not only provide empty calories but also disrupt the body's metabolism, potentially leading to weight gain and fat storage. Swapping sugary drinks for water or unsweetened alternatives is a simple yet effective way to cut back on added sugars.

Sweetener Dilemma

The allure of zero-calorie artificial sweeteners as a sugar substitute is tempered by concerns about their potential health effects. While deemed safe by regulatory agencies, artificial sweeteners have been associated with weight gain, altered food preferences, and disruptions in hunger signals. Moreover, these sweeteners can impact the gut micro biome, which plays a crucial role in overall health.

In light of these uncertainties, the choice between sugar, natural sweeteners, and artificial sweeteners ultimately boils down to personal preference. While some experts advocate for avoiding artificial sweeteners in favor of whole, minimally processed foods, others suggest considering the risk-benefit ratio of different sweetening options. As research continues to uncover the long-term effects of sweeteners on our health, making informed choices and prioritizing whole foods remain key to maintaining a balanced and healthy diet.

Source: [nbcnews](#)