Caring for your teeth

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HIDDEN SUGARS

With most processed foods and drinks containing large amounts of added sugar, it's not surprising that many Australians have consumed more than the daily recommended limit of sugar before they have finished their breakfast. One serving of breakfast cereal with strawberry yoghurt can contain as much as 24 grams (6 teaspoons) of sugar.



Reduce your sugar intake by checking food labels

We often think of sugar as the white stuff that we put into our tea or coffee, or use when we're baking cakes. That sugar is called sucrose. But sugar comes in many shapes and forms, and sometimes it's hard to know what we're really eating. Reading the labels on food products can be daunting, so the list below will help you find those hidden sugars, and be aware of what you're eating. Remember that all of these sugars can cause harm to your teeth.

Despite the many different names, the one thing to remember is that they are all essentially sugar. Too much will lead to tooth decay, as well as increase your risk of other health problems such as obesity and Type 2 Diabetes. Some sugars may be marketed as 'healthy' or 'natural', but they are no better for you than any other type of sugar.

You don't need to avoid sugar that occurs naturally in whole foods. Fruit, vegetables and dairy products all contain natural sugar, but they also contain fibre and other nutrients that make them far healthier than packaged and processed foods.

Sugar and tooth decay

There is evidence that sugar consumption should be reduced to less than 5% of total energy intake to reduce the risk of tooth decay. Frequency, timing and length of time in the mouth all play a part in the likelihood of sugar causing tooth decay, with frequent snacking and keeping sugary foods in your mouth for a longer time increasing the risk.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends limiting added sugar consumption to less than 6 teaspoons per day to reduce the risk of tooth decay and other health problems.

The average Australian consumes 60 grams (15 teaspoons) of added sugar per day, and children aged 14-18 years consume a staggering 81.9 grams (20 teaspoons) per day. Although sugar-sweetened drinks contribute around one-third of the added sugar in our diets, most added sugar comes from all of the other processed foods that we eat, such as breakfast cereal, bread, spreads, cakes, biscuits, muesli bars and ready-made sauces and meals.

Common names for added sugars

- agave nectar
- brown rice syrup
- brown sugar
- cane juice
- cane sugar
- caster sugar
- corn syrup
- demerara sugar
- dextrose
- fructose
- glucose
- golden syrup
- high fructose corn syrup
- honey
- icing sugar
- invert sugar
- lactose
- malt syrup
- maltodextrin
- maltose
- maple syrup
- molasses
- muscovado sugar
- palm sugar
- raw sugar
- rock sugar
- sucrose
- treacle
- turbinado sugar

Tooth decay

Our mouths are full of many different types of bacteria. Some harmful bacteria feed on the sugars in our diet and turn this into acids that destroy the tooth enamel (the hard protective outer layer of the tooth). Every time we eat or drink, these bacteria make acids that demineralise (or dissolve) some of the tooth enamel. After we eat, our saliva washes away the acid, and minerals in the saliva help to remineralise (or re-build) the tooth enamel. Fluoride in toothpaste and tap water also helps to re-build the enamel.

If we eat more sugar, or eat more frequently (snacking), the acid attack can dissolve the enamel faster than the saliva can help to repair it, and eventually a cavity (hole in the tooth) is formed. Once this happens, the tooth can no longer repair itself, and the tooth will need a filling. If this is left for too long, the tooth may need root canal treatment, or may need to be removed. Limiting your sugar intake is important to prevent tooth decay.

Sugars
Avoiding sugar completely is not necessary, but try to avoid larger amounts of added sugars. If sugar content per 100g is more than 15g, check that sugar (or alternative names for added sugar) is not listed high on the ingredient list.

Nutrition Information

Servings per package: 16
Serving size: 30g (2/3 cup)

	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	**432kJ**	**1441kJ**
Protein	2.8g	9.3g
Fat		
Total	0.4g	1.2g
Saturated	0.1g	0.3g
Carbohydrate		
Total	18.9g	62.9g
Sugars	3.5g	11.8g
Fibre	6.4g	21.2g
Sodium	65mg	215mg

Source: National Health and Medical Research Council

Tips to help lower your risk of tooth decay

- **Choose water and avoid sugary drinks.**
- **Eat plenty of unprocessed food such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, legumes, wholegrains, fish and lean meat.**
- **Check the food label on packaged foods, and look at both the amount of sugar per serving and the total amount, as there may be more than one serving in the package. Suggested serving sizes are often much smaller than what we really eat. Try to keep total added sugars to less than 6 teaspoons (24 grams) per day.**
- **Look at the ingredient list on packaged food to see where the sugars are coming from – for example naturally occurring sugars in dried or whole fruit are better than added sugars. See the 'Common names for added sugars' list.**
- **If the packaged product contains too much sugar, then try making your own from scratch and control exactly how much sugar goes in. Homemade alternatives are healthier.**
- **Limit the amount of cakes, biscuits and sugary desserts you eat. Fresh fruit is a great dessert, or for something less sweet, some cheese and nuts.**

Reducing the sugar in your diet is a long-term commitment to a healthier you, so don't rush things, and don't go to extremes. It's OK to have a small slice of birthday cake, or to share the occasional sweet dessert, as long as it's not a regular thing.



Drink	Average Qty sugar
WATER – choose as your main drink throughout the day	0
MILK low fat 250ml (1 cup) natural sugar	14g 3 tsp
100% FRUIT JUICE 250ml natural sugar	24g 6 tsp
FLAVOURED MILK 300ml added sugar – but has some healthy nutrients	28g 7 tsp
FLAVOURED FRUIT DRINK 250ml high added sugar	27g 7 tsp
ENERGY DRINK high added sugar	36g 8.5 tsp
SOFT DRINK CAN 375ml high added sugar	38g 9 tsp
SOFT DRINK BUDDY 600ml high added sugar	64g 15 tsp
SOFT DRINK 1.25 Ltr high added sugar	137g 33 tsp

Source: Department of Health

Sugar-free Smiles helps to raise awareness about dental health, and advocates for public health policies and regulatory initiatives to reduce sugar consumption and improve the oral health of all Australians.

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