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## Sugar Shocker: How Much Sugar Does Your Child Eat?

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It doesn't take much digging to quickly learn that the Standard American Diet (SAD) is laden with refined sugar from processed foods and beverages. Soda, snack foods, cereal, yogurt, ice cream, pastries, bread, and even condiments like salad dressing are sources of added sugar, not to mention other inflammatory substances like gluten, dairy, low-quality oils, and hydrogenated fats as well. But how much sugar does your child really eat? The amount may surprise you.

According to a recent study, it was estimated that children see food marketing 30 times per week and adolescents 189 times per week on social media apps.<sup>1</sup> On a daily basis, young people are bombarded with marketing messages from the food industry promoting unhealthy foods that are so heavily processed they rarely resemble real food at all. Even organic granola bars and packaged snacks can contain high amounts of sugar and refined carbohydrates, though marketed as "healthy," "natural," or "gluten-free."

### A Day in the Life of a "Healthy Diet"

So how much sugar does an average child eat? To illustrate just how quickly sugar can add up, let's take a look at a day in the life of an average child's diet. To narrow our focus, let's say this child eats relatively "healthy": mostly organic, no soda, no candy, and limited dairy and gluten.

An average day may look something like this:

#### **Breakfast**

1 gluten-free waffle with butter and jam

2 organic turkey sausage links

A small glass of orange juice

#### **Snack**

Carrots and celery with ranch dressing

#### **Lunch**

Sandwich with 2 slices of gluten-free bread, turkey, lettuce, tomato, and mayonnaise

1 applesauce cup

A handful of trail mix with dried fruit, nuts, and chocolate chips

#### **Snack**

1 fruit and nut granola bar

A small glass of organic chocolate almond milk

#### **Dinner**

1 organic hotdog or brat on a gluten-free bun with ketchup

A handful of homemade oven-baked fries

1 ear of corn on the cob

### **Treat**

½ cup dairy-free ice cream

When you add up all the sugar in this average daily menu, it comes to a whopping **126 grams**.

That's the equivalent of nearly five Snickers bars!

What exactly is all this sugar doing to a child's body?

## **The Impact of Sugar on Kids' Health**

When it comes to health effects, sugar impacts children in much the same way as it does adults. Metabolic disorders such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, and fatty liver disease are linked to higher sugar diets, as well as inflammatory conditions like asthma and acne. Sugar negatively impacts digestive health, altering the gut microbiome and therefore gut function. A recent study also found that sugar-containing beverage consumption in children was linked with higher cardiometabolic risk scores and elevated triglycerides.<sup>2</sup>

A high sugar diet also sets kids up for an energy roller coaster. After a "sugar high" comes the dreaded sugar low (energy crash). These ups and downs can lead to behavioral issues, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, hyperactivity, and disrupted sleep.

Maintaining blood sugar balance is key for helping kids stay sharp mentally and energized physically. Balanced blood sugar is supported through limiting added sugar in the diet, including plenty of protein and healthy fats, and adding lots of fiber-rich vegetables that help to improve glycemic response.

Reducing sugar ultimately contributes to the greater goal of reducing the overall inflammation load on your child's body. For most people, inflammation is not caused by one factor but rather many factors such as food allergies, pathogens, yeast, mold, or other toxic exposures.<sup>3</sup> But one of the most common contributing factors to inflammation is a high carb/sugar diet that keeps the body in a chronically inflamed "holding pattern" due to the constant elevation of insulin. That's why [in our clinics](#) one of the first steps we suggest patients take on their health restoration journey is to adopt a low-sugar diet focusing on whole, real, unprocessed foods.

In contrast to the sugar-laden daily diet above, a low-sugar diet based on unprocessed foods may look something like this:

### **Breakfast**

2 eggs scrambled in coconut oil

2 organic turkey sausage links

½ cup blueberries

## Snack

Carrots and celery with dairy-free ranch dressing

## Lunch

Lettuce wraps with chicken, guacamole, tomatoes, and shredded carrots

1 applesauce cup

Handful of nuts mixed with 1 tablespoon Lily's Chocolate Chips

## Snack

Rice cake topped with almond butter, hemp seeds, and cinnamon

## Dinner

Turkey Burgers and Tangy Sauce

Roasted Broccoli Salad

A handful of homemade oven-baked fries

## Treat:

½ cup thawed frozen cherries topped with coconut cream

This daily menu has **42 grams** of sugar across the entire day, most of which is derived from fruits and vegetables. That's 84 grams less than the other menu!

## Practical Steps to Get the Sugar Out

There is no perfect way to go about reducing the amount of sugar your child eats. The important thing is to start somewhere! Start simple and, as your family adjusts to a lower sugar lifestyle, continue taking additional steps from there.

### Start Somewhere:

Read labels *closely and carefully*. This is absolutely the most important first step to take when it comes to sugar awareness. Read every label and look for sources of hidden sugar in all store-bought products. Be mindful of alternative names for sugar as well (see our list below).

Don't serve sugary beverages at home. Reserve high sugar beverages for very limited special occasions or outings only. Make your home a sugar-free beverage zone.

Prepare baked goods or treats from scratch instead of buying them. Preparing them yourself will give you control over the quality of ingredients used and the amount of sweeteners added. Look for recipes that use alternative sweeteners like xylitol, stevia, monk fruit, honey, or fruit purees. (Our recipes section is a great place to start!)

Limit bread. An average slice of bread contains anywhere from 2-5 grams of sugar and 15-20 grams of carbohydrates, which can add up very quickly. Swap out bread for lettuce wraps, coconut flour tortillas, or other vegetable-based alternatives like collard leaves.

Eat more meals at home. Restaurants add sugar to nearly everything on their menu. At home you control the quality, quantity, and frequency of added sweeteners.

If and when your child does eat sugar, ensure it is accompanied by a balanced meal that includes protein and fat. Eating sugar alone will likely cause a sugar high followed by a low. Once the body experiences this low, it will demand more sugar and this up-and-down cycle will continue. (Consult our [school lunch article](#) for an excellent list of balanced meals and snacks.)

Offer your child fresh fruit to satisfy their sweet tooth instead of cookies, candy, baked goods, or sugary beverages.

## **The Many Names for Sugar**

When reading labels for added sugar, it's important to know that sugar goes by many names. Here are the most common to watch out for when you're reading labels:

### **Granulated sugar:**

Sugar, cane sugar, cane juice, or cane juice crystals

Beet sugar

Brown sugar

Confectioner's sugar (powdered sugar or icing sugar)

Corn syrup solids

Demerara sugar

Dextrin

Ethyl maltol

Golden sugar

Maltodextrin

Turbinado sugar (or raw sugar)

Sucanat

### **Liquid sugar:**

Corn syrup or high fructose corn syrup (HFCS)

Carob syrup

Evaporated cane sugar

Fruit juice or fruit juice concentrate

Malt syrup

Golden syrup

Caramel

Barley malt

### **Simple sugar:**

Dextrose

Fructose

Glucose

Maltose

Sucrose

### **Artificial sweeteners:**

Artificial sweeteners can be even more harmful than regular sugar. For example, aspartame has also been linked to conditions like diabetes, Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia, and cancer.<sup>4</sup> (For more on healthy swaps for sugar and artificial sugar, check out [this article](#).) Avoid these fake sugars:

Aspartame (Equal, NutraSweet)

Sucralose (Splenda)

Saccharin (Sweet'N Low, Sugar Twin)

Acesulfame K (Sunett)

Stevia with chemical fillers (Truvia) (pure stevia extract with no fillers is okay)

References:

<sup>1</sup><https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30690924/>

<sup>2</sup><https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32021763/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.thewellnessway.com/foods-that-cause-inflammation/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.thewellnessway.com/sugar-swaps/>

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