

# LIVE healthy

## Yes, Even You Can Ditch Sugar

Want lasting energy? Less belly fat? Younger-looking skin? Of course you do! Here's all the motivation you need to break up with the sweet stuff.

By SARAH DIGIULIO

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Weaning yourself off sugary treats comes with serious perks.



**KICKING A SUGAR HABIT IS** challenging—even for the most strong-willed among us. See, research has found that sugar tricks your brain into wanting more and more of it. But there's good news. A little sweetness is okay—emphasis on little. The American Heart Association recommends no more than six teaspoons of added sugar a day for women (see page 55 for the sugar content of everyday eats). Also okay: the sugar found in whole foods like fruits and veggies, says Kimber Stanhope, PhD, a nutritional biologist at the University of California, Davis. “These naturally occurring sugars come packaged with good-for-you vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients.” But if you can dial back your intake of added sugar, she says, you'll start to rack up some amazing health benefits. In fact, the perks of the less-sugar life are so good, we think they'll motivate you to try to cut it (mostly) out.

### GET READY FOR YOUNGER-LOOKING SKIN

The sugar in your diet affects the amount of sugar in your bloodstream—and

studies suggest that high blood sugar levels set up a molecular domino effect called glycation. Say what? That's just a fancy term for a process that can hinder the repair of your skin's collagen, the protein that keeps it looking plump. A diet full of treats can also lead to reduced elasticity and premature wrinkles.

Added sugar is hiding in countless sneaky places—even salad dressing and barbecue sauce.

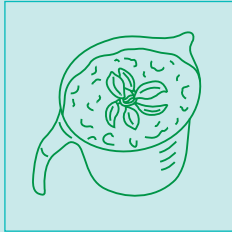


### SCORE LASTING ENERGY

Added sugars are simple carbohydrates. This means they're digested fast and enter your bloodstream quickly, providing that familiar rush. But once that shot of sugar is metabolized, you're in for a crash. You may be riding this energy roller coaster all day, since added sugar is hiding in countless sneaky places—even salad dressing and barbecue sauce. “When you eat foods high in protein and healthy fat instead, such as a handful of almonds, they'll supply you with a steadier stream of energy that lasts longer,” says Diane Sanfilippo, a nutrition consultant and author of *The 21-Day Sugar Detox Daily Guide*.

# THE SUGAR LOWDOWN

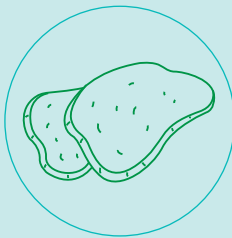
The American Heart Association advises that women consume no more than six teaspoons of added sugar per day. To help keep your intake down, it's important to consider how much sugar—both naturally occurring and added—is in what you eat. Here, the teaspoon equivalents found in some common foods.



**½ cup jarred marinara sauce:**



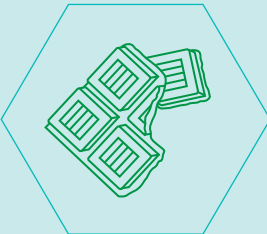
(from naturally occurring and added sugar)



**2 slices of whole-wheat bread:**



(predominantly from added sugar)



**4 squares of 70% cacao dark chocolate:**



(all from added sugar)



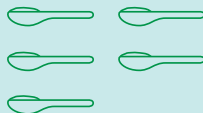
**1 serving (5.3 oz.) of nonfat vanilla Greek yogurt:**



(from naturally occurring and added sugar)



**12 oz. sports drink:**



(all from added sugar)

Thankfully, research suggests that slashing your sugar intake can help lessen sagging and other visible signs of aging.

## SAY BYE-BYE TO BELLY FAT

Everyone knows that a daily sugary-soda habit can pack on the pounds, especially in the tummy area. But what you may not realize is just how dangerous that is. Sugary fare spikes your blood sugar, triggering a flood of insulin through your body, which over time encourages fat to accumulate around your middle. Known as visceral fat, these fat cells deep in the abdomen are the riskiest kind because they generate adipokines and adipose hormones—chemical troublemakers that travel to your organs and blood vessels, where they bring on inflammation that can contribute to conditions like heart disease and cancer. So, when you cut back on pop and desserts, you'll start reducing belly fat and the dangerous conditions that come with it.

## DROP POUNDS FASTER

Increased insulin levels don't just add pounds to your stomach; they put fat cells all over your body into calorie-storage overdrive, says endocrinologist David Ludwig, MD, a professor of nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and coauthor of *Always Delicious*. "I call insulin the Miracle-Gro for your fat cells. It's just not the sort of miracle you want happening in your body." Replacing refined carbs and sugary foods in

your diet with healthy fats helps keep your insulin stable, he says, so fewer calories get stored as fat. As a result, "hunger decreases, metabolism speeds up, and you can lose weight with less struggle."

## STOP WORRYING ABOUT DIABETES

Since having fewer sweets helps you keep off excess pounds, you'll also be more protected against type 2 diabetes. But eating less sugar also lowers your risk of the disease in another way: "A diet with lots of fast-digesting carbohydrates, like sugar, requires the pancreas to release lots of insulin, meal after meal, day after day," explains Dr. Ludwig. "That excessive demand may overtax insulin-producing cells, causing them to malfunction, eventually leading to diabetes."

## SET YOUR TICKER UP FOR SUCCESS

Good heart health helps you power through everything from intense spin classes to late-night work deadlines. But fueling up with cookies and caramel lattes doesn't do your heart any favors. Research suggests added sugar can take a real toll on the cardiovascular system. A 2014 study revealed that people who consumed 17 percent to 21 percent of their daily calories from the sweet stuff had a 38 percent higher risk of dying from heart disease compared with those who kept their added sugar intake to 8 percent of their daily calories. The bottom line: Cutting back now will pay off big-time later. ■