



Secrets of Sugars

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Sugar: It's a word with a bad reputation. But there's more to know about this sweetener, and the news isn't all bad.

The truth is, Americans do eat too much sugar, and the No. 1 source is sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks, coffee beverages and fruit drinks. Baked goods, candy, ice cream and chocolate are also high in sugar.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recommend no more than 12 teaspoons (48 grams) of **added sugars** per day. Unfortunately, most Americans get closer to 22 teaspoons (88 grams) daily, which is well above the recommendation.

What are added sugars? They are any sweetener that's added to food, including sugar, high fructose corn syrup, honey or syrup. And yes, even sugars with unusual names, such as **evaporated cane juice, agave** or **date sugar** are considered added sugars. These products are often marketed as healthy alternatives due to the presence of trace minerals — but you'd need to eat cups of them to get any substantial quantities of minerals (don't try that).

Too much of any added sugar — even one that sounds healthy — is problematic since it increases the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

What doesn't count as added sugar? **Natural sugar** occurs naturally in fruit, sweet vegetables, milk and yogurt (e.g., milk sugar or lactose). Since these foods also contain vitamins, minerals, protein (in dairy) and fiber (in fruit), the sugar is not as problematic.

Natural sugars do not count toward the DGA's limit of 12 teaspoons of added sugar per day. That means you can enjoy whole fruit; the DGA recommends two cups a day.

The Gift of Giving

Helping others helps you, too.



Volunteers make a vital difference in the lives of others. And volunteering your time and efforts can benefit your own health as well — from reducing stress to boosting self-confidence and becoming more content over time.

People volunteer for different reasons: to explore health care careers, sharpen skills needed for work, stay active during retirement, and put their free time to good use. While volunteers come from many backgrounds, they all share the desire to help others. In return, research has shown that volunteering may provide some important benefits, such as:

Lower risk of depression: The social interaction and support system within volunteering based on common interests have been shown to decrease depression.

Reduced stress: Time spent helping others may raise your sense of meaning and appreciation, both given and received, which can have a stress-reducing effect.

Gaining new skills and experience: The work that volunteers provide is essential on many levels, which gives them a sense of purpose.

Socializing with others: Fundamental to volunteering is making new friends and building relationships as part of a shared activity together.

In addition, regular volunteering can improve your self-confidence and sense of self-worth as you improve someone else's life.



Volunteer opportunities include: museums, libraries, senior centers, service organizations, local animal shelters, youth organizations, national parks or conservation efforts (may vary due to COVID-19 conditions).

Learn more at [volunteer.gov](https://www.volunteer.gov).

Toning Up Made Easy

No time to fit in hour-long exercise routines?

No sweat. Boosting your physical fitness is a good idea. It can become routine when you weave it into your daily lifestyle, even during the busy holiday season. The trick is keeping exercise simple so you won't view it as one more thing you must do.

Learn ways every day to get up and move more. Try these (and remember to warm up with light exercise first):

- Welcome your day with a walk in the fresh air.
- Work up a sweat indoors with physical chores; sweep, vacuum or wash windows.
- Pace while thinking or talking on a phone.
- Garden, or sweep out the garage or walkways.
- Walk through a shopping mall after parking several blocks away.
- Add stretching and walking breaks to boost energy and metabolism.
- Do two sets of seven strength-training movements for ten minutes.
- Limber up with some squats and lunges.
- Do some errands on foot — trips to the store, hair salon or post office.
- Meet a friend for a scenic walk in the park.

Kick it up a notch:

- Use an exercise machine while you watch a favorite TV series; you'll look forward to viewing the show's progress at your next workout.
- Try exercise bands — a portable, easy way to build muscle.
- Liven up your solo workouts with music.
- Exercise with a good friend to keep each other committed; the buddy system is a proven way to stay motivated.
- Swim at a community pool after work instead of passively watching TV.
- Treat yourself to golf lessons, and practice.



Mix up your activities to keep fitness pursuits interesting and pleasurable. Examples: Alternate daily walks with biking, or if your strength training workout becomes tedious, create multiple routines and vary them each week.

Improve Your Relaxation Techniques



Learning to relax can help you be resilient to stress.

But taking a little time out to get away from work and personal tasks isn't always enough to truly relax your mind and body.

That's why learning how to strengthen your relaxation skills can help you trigger your body's **relaxation response**. It's the opposite of a stress response and results in calmer breathing, lower blood pressure, better digestion and a reduced heart rate.

Take five to ten minutes to regularly use these relaxation techniques. Try these:

- **Autogenic (self-generated) relaxation** involves visual imagery and body awareness to reduce stress. Visualize a peaceful setting and focus on slow, relaxing breathing while feeling your muscles relax.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** helps you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. Start with your toes and work up to your head or go in the opposite direction and tense muscles in each part of your body for about five seconds, relax for 30 seconds and repeat.

Remember, your ability to relax improves with practice. Make patience a habit.

Q: Cold, flu and COVID-19 symptoms?



A: **The viruses that cause colds, influenza and COVID-19 spread in respiratory droplets and often have similar symptoms.** When you're trying to tell which condition you have, consider some of these differences.

COVID-19 vs. a cold: Shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and loss of taste and smell occur more commonly with COVID-19 than the common cold. Colds are more likely to involve sneezing.

COVID-19 vs. the flu: Both conditions can cause a cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and shortness of breath. Unlike influenza, COVID-19 often involves the loss of taste or smell; the loss often occurs early in the illness without a stuffy nose.

When to get tested: It's often difficult to tell what condition you have based on your symptoms alone. Get tested if there's a possibility you could have COVID-19 since the risk of serious illness is higher than with other common viruses. If you need help finding a testing site, check with your local health department or district. And if you haven't already, get vaccinated for COVID-19. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov).

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Stretching: Stay Flexible at Work**, is at personalbest.com/extras/21V12tools.

