

Shed That Sweet Tooth



PETER DAZELEY—GETTY IMAGES

The World Health Organization is advising people around the world to cut down on the amount of sugar they consume each day.

While sweet treats can be hard to resist, the World Health Organization (WHO) has set new dietary guidelines for people around the world. The guidelines, released on Wednesday, advise that both adults and children cut back on their sugar intake to stay healthy.

In a statement, Francesco Branca, director of the WHO's nutrition department, said there is "solid evidence" that reducing daily sugar intake "reduces the risk of obesity and tooth decay."

Keep it Fresh

The guidelines do not apply to the sugars in fresh fruits and vegetables or those that are naturally present in milk. According to the WHO, there is no reported evidence of negative effects of consuming those sugars. Instead, the new guidelines focus on "added" or "free" sugars. These include sugars that are added to processed foods and drinks such as donuts, cookies, candy, and soft drinks.

Added sugars are sometimes described as "hidden" sugars because they exist in foods we might not think of as sweets, such as honey and ketchup. Health experts advise that consumers look at ingredients on food packages to help make better-informed decisions.

The WHO recommends that people in the United States, Europe, and other Western societies should cut their average sugar intake by about two-thirds, or down to just 10% of their overall calories. For developing countries, where dental care is less advanced and cavities are more difficult to prevent, the WHO recommends that sugar intake be reduced to 5%.

In the U.S., adults currently get about 11 to 15% of their calories from added sugars. Children typically consume even more, as it can account for up to 16% of their diets. In Europe, sugar intake varies by country. For adults in Hungary and Norway, it is about 7%. In Spain and the United Kingdom, sugar makes up as much as 17% of adults' diets. The WHO reports that for children in Europe, sugar intake can be much higher, ranging from about 12% in Denmark, Slovenia, and Sweden, to nearly 25% in Portugal.

"The trouble is, we really do like sugar in a lot of things," said scientist Kieran Clarke, of the University of Oxford. "Even if you are not just eating lollies and candy, you are probably eating a fair amount of sugar."

But Clarke also notes that for those people who can't shake their love for sweets, getting more exercise is a good solution. "If you get enough exercise, you can eat almost anything," she said. "But it's very hard to avoid large amounts of sugar unless all you're eating is fruits and vegetables."

ACTIVITIES:

1. In what ways is reducing sugar intake good for health? (3)
2. According to the WHO, what percentage of the overall calorie content should be sugar? (6)
3. Which country in Europe has the highest sugar intake? (7)
4. How could someone who likes sugar, still keep healthy? (9)