“Added Sugars” to be included on the new Nutrition Facts Label

Perhaps you’ve heard that the new Nutrition Facts Label (NFL) will have a listing of “Added Sugars.” This will help consumers be aware of how much Added Sugar is in foods. Consumers may or may not decide to reduce the amount of certain foods with Added Sugars, based on their individual needs or choices. We will have to wait for many products to offer the new NFL, since the original deadline of July 2018 has been extended. However, some food manufacturers are already using the new NFL, including the “Added Sugars” listing.

Defining “Added Sugars”

The FDA definition of Added Sugars includes sugars that are either added during the processing or packaging of foods, and include sugars from syrups and honey; as well as sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices (such as concentrated apple, pear, or white grape juice) that are more than would be expected from the same amount of 100% fruit or vegetable juice of the same type. These sugars will be listed in the “ingredients” list, usually located below the NFL. Did you know there are over 50 names for Added Sugars?

Where “Added Sugars” are found

The major sources of Added Sugars are sugar-sweetened beverages including soft drinks; fruit drinks that are not 100% fruit juice; coffee and tea drinks; sports and energy drinks; and some alcoholic beverages. Snacks and sweets also have a lot of Added Sugar. These include grain-based desserts (such as cookies, cakes, pies, donuts); dairy desserts (such as sweetened yogurt and ice cream); candies; sugars (including honey, brown sugar); jams and jellies; syrups (including maple syrup and agave); and sweet toppings. Added Sugars can also be found in many unsuspecting places. Once you start reading the new NFL, you’ll likely be surprised at the foods that have Added Sugars (such as salad dressings, sauces, ketchup, bread) and how much Added Sugar is in them.

Why limiting “Added Sugars” is important

Added Sugars can be a part of a healthy dietary pattern. It is difficult to get enough dietary fiber and needed vitamins and minerals while staying within calorie limits if we consume more than 10% of our total daily calories from Added Sugar. As you’ve likely heard before, Added Sugars are “empty calories.” The average recommendation is to not consume more than 6-12 teaspoons per day for women and 9-12 teaspoons for men – and that includes the amount in food and any sugars added separately. On average, Americans consume 20-25 teaspoons of Added Sugar per day!
We now know that diets high in Added Sugars and other refined starches trigger inflammation in the body. This inflammation may be felt (such as in arthritis), but most often is not felt. Inflammation puts people at greater risk of many serious health conditions such as pre-diabetes, type 2 Diabetes, some cancers, high blood pressure, high lipids, gout, mental decline, and arthritis to name a few.

Keep in mind that if you have diabetes or hypoglycemia, you will still want to focus on the amount of Total Carbohydrates listed on the label, which includes Starches, Fiber and Sugars. Total Sugars are divided into 2 categories: Natural Sugars found naturally in fruit and dairy; and Added Sugars added in the processing of the food. For example, a bowl of strawberries will have Natural fruit sugar in the strawberries and may also have Added Sugar if you choose to sweeten them.

Finding “Added Sugars” on the Nutrition Facts Label
The new NFL mandates “Includes X g Added Sugars” to be included under “Total Sugars” to help consumers understand how much sugar has been added to the product. “Added Sugars” will be listed in grams and as percent Daily Value. Four (4) grams of sugar = 1 teaspoon.

How can I decrease my intake of Added Sugars?
Once the new NFL becomes widely available, it will be easier to compare similar products and choose the one lower in Added Sugars. Until then, here are some suggestions:

- Get a start on being a label reader if you are not one already. Knowing that names of different sugars can help as you scan the ingredients list to better understand if a food is sweetened and to what extent. Be on the lookout for the new Nutrition Facts Label!
- If you are a sugar-sweetened beverage drinker (soda, energy, sports, sweet coffee or tea, fruit drinks), opt for water instead (Best Option!) or find a no-calorie sweetened beverage that you like.
- There are many no-calorie sweeteners on the shelves today (blue, pink, yellow, green, orange packets) and you’re likely to find a no-calorie sweetened beverage that you can substitute for the sugar sweetened equivalent at your table and in cooking.
- Consider avoiding foods that list some type of sugar as the first or second ingredient on the ingredients list. Often naturally sweet foods can satisfy a craving.

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