Sugar has taken center stage as public health enemy number one, and for very good reason. The sweet stuff’s bad for your body (refined sugar is linked to: obesity, diabetes, hypertension, high blood pressure, hypoglycemia, inflammation, cravings, depression, headaches, fatigue, acne, skin irritation, nervous tension, hardening of arteries and violent behavior) it’s extremely addicting and hiding (yes, hiding!) in absolutely everything! We expect to find sugar lurking in candy bars and soda cans, but food manufacturers have been dumping copious amounts of sugar into items that most of us wouldn’t expect – like salad dressings, breads and yogurts – and as a result we’re consuming more sugar than we realize.

**How much sugar are we consuming?**

According to reports conducted by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, Americans are eating between 20 - 25 teaspoons of sugar a day.

**How much sugar should we be consuming?**

The American Heart Association recommends keeping sugar consumption under 38 grams (approx. 9 teaspoons) a day for men and 25 grams (approx. 6 teaspoons) a day for women.¹

To know (and limit) how much sugar you’re consuming, you have to become a label savvy sleuth. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently (for the first time ever) mandated that food labels begin to include added sugars on the nutrition facts panel, which will helpful in identifying how many naturally occurring sugars are in the product vs. how many have been added during processing.

BUT...it’s even more important to be able to identify which sugars you’re consuming. While naturally occurring sugars are still sugars, they are broken down in the body differently than refined, processed (added) sugars. Natural sugars have more fiber and nutrients, thereby slowing down the process of which fructose leaves the intestines, spikes blood-sugar levels, enters the liver and gets stored as fat.

The food industry currently has over 60 names for sugar (not including the artificial sweeteners who come with chemical baggage we’d rather avoid) – there are the technical names for sugar whose names generally end in “ose” (glucose, fructose, sucrose, lactose and maltose), there are the natural sugars extracted from plants (like coconut sugar, maple syrup and molasses) and then there are the highly processed and refined sugars (like table sugar and high fructose corn syrup).
Here's a list of the most common types of sugar you'll find lurking in ingredient lists. I've highlighted some of my favorite natural sugars, which are okay to use in moderation.

**The Many Names of Sugar**

1. **Agave nectar**
2. **Barbados sugar**
3. **Barley malt**
4. **Beet sugar**
5. **Birch sugar**
6. **Brown rice syrup**
7. **Brown sugar**
8. **Buttered syrup**
9. **Cane juice**
10. **Cane sugar**
11. **Caramel**
12. **Carob syrup**
13. **Castor sugar**
14. **Coconut sugar**
15. **Confectioner's sugar**
16. **Corn sweetener**
17. **Corn syrup**
18. **Corn-syrup solids**
19. **Crystalline fructose**
20. **Date sugar**
21. **Dehydrated cane juice**
22. **Demerara sugar**
23. **Dextrin**
24. **Dextrose**
25. **Diastatic malt**
26. **Diatase**
27. **Dried oat syrup**
28. **Ethyl matol**
29. **Evaporated cane juice crystals**
30. **Evaporated cane juice**
31. **Florida crystals**
32. **Fructose**
33. **Fruit juice (& concentrate)**
34. **Galactose**
35. **Glucose**
36. **Golden syrup**
37. **Grape sugar**
38. **Gum syrup**
39. **High-fructose corn syrup**
40. **Honey**
41. **Icing sugar**
42. **Invert sugar**
43. **Lactose**
44. **Malt syrup**
45. **Maltodextrin**
46. **Maltose**
47. **Mannitol**
48. **Maple syrup**
49. **Molasses (Black strap)**
50. **Muscavado**
51. **Palm sugar**
52. **Panocha**
53. **Refiner's syrup**
54. **Rice syrup**
55. **Simple syrup**
56. **Stevia**
57. **Sorbitol**
58. **Sorghum syrup**
59. **Sucanat**
60. **Sucrose**
61. **Sugar (and Sugar in the Raw)**
62. **Sugar Alcohols (Erythritol, Malitol, Xylitol)**
63. **Treacle**
64. **Turbinado**
The Best Natural Sugars

Agave Nectar
Agave nectar, or agave syrup, is a natural liquid sweetener made from the juice of the agave cactus. Many diabetics use agave nectar as an alternative to refined sugars and artificial sweeteners because of its relatively low effect on blood glucose levels\(^1\). However, agave is high in fructose and has been under much scrutiny due to possible manufacturing processes, which are similar to that of high fructose corn syrup. Some research suggests that fructose affects the hormone leptin, which controls your appetite and satiety. Too much fructose may result in overeating and weight gain, so it’s important to consume agave nectar in reasonable moderation\(^2\).

Barley Malt
Barley malt syrup is a thick, sticky, brown sweetener and is about half as sweet as refined white sugar. It is made from the soaking, sprouting, mashing, cooking and roasting of barley. Many consumers prefer this natural sweetener because it moves through the digestive system slower than other refined sugars\(^3\). It contains approximately 65% maltose, 30% complex carbohydrate, 3% protein. Barley malt can also come in the form of powder.

Brown Rice Syrup
This product consists of brown rice that has been ground and cooked, converting the starches to maltose. Brown rice syrup tastes like moderately sweet butterscotch and is quite delicious. In recipes, replace each cup of white sugar with ¼ cup brown rice syrup, and reduce the amount of other liquids. Brown rice syrup is made of 50% complex carbohydrates, 45% maltose, and 3% glucose. The small amount of glucose is absorbed into the bloodstream immediately, but the complex carbohydrates and maltose are much more slowly absorbed, providing a steady supply of energy\(^4\).

Coconut Sugar
Coconut sugar is made from the sap of the coconut palm tree buds that gets boiled down and granulated. It’s a very low glycemic sweetener, so it doesn’t cause a blood sugar spike. Coconut sugar is rich in vitamin B8, iron, zinc and potassium, and it also contains a good amount of inulin (dietary fiber you don’t digest in your upper gastrointestinal tract\(^0\), which acts as a prebiotic. Coconut sugar is more coarse than white sugar and it can be used as a one-to-one replacement for both white and brown sugars, making it ideal for baking.

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**Date Sugar**
Date sugar consists of finely ground, dehydrated dates, utilizing this fruit’s vitamin, mineral and fiber content. If you like the taste of dates, this will definitely appeal to you. Date sugar can be used as a direct replacement for sugar and comes in a granulated form; however, it can clump, and doesn’t melt, making it an impractical substitution for certain baked goods and beverages.

**Honey**
One of the oldest natural sweeteners; honey is sweeter than sugar. Depending on the plant source, honey can have a range of flavors, from dark and strongly flavored, to light and mildly flavored. Raw honey contains small amounts of enzymes, minerals and vitamins. It’s also said that consuming local honey can help build up your immunity to common allergens in your area – by introducing your body to the bee pollen.5

**Maple Syrup**
Maple syrup is made from boiled-down maple tree sap and is a great source of manganese and zinc6. Approximately 40 gallons of sap are needed to make one gallon of maple syrup. It adds a pleasant flavor to foods and is great for baking. Be sure to buy 100% pure maple syrup and not maple-flavored corn syrup. Grade B is stronger in flavor and said to have more minerals than Grade A.

**Molasses**
Organic molasses is probably the most nutritious sweetener derived from sugar cane or sugar beet, and is made by a process of clarifying and blending the extracted juices. The longer the juice is boiled, the less sweet, more nutritious and darker the product is. Molasses imparts a very distinct flavor to food. Blackstrap molasses, the most nutritious variety, is a good source of iron, calcium, magnesium and potassium.

**Stevia**
This leafy herb (also known as honey leaf) has been used for centuries by native South Americans. The extract from stevia is approximately 100 to 300 times sweeter than white sugar. It can be used in cooking, baking and as a sugar substitute in most beverages. Stevia has been shown to have a positive effect on blood sugar levels by increasing insulin production, and decreasing insulin resistance7. Stevia is available in a powder or liquid form, but be sure to get the green or brown liquids or powders, as the white and clear versions are highly refined.

Sucanat
Short for sugar cane natural, this brand-name product consists of evaporated organic cane juice made through a mechanical rather than a chemical process. It is, therefore, less refined and retains many of sugarcane's original vitamins and minerals. It has a grainy texture and can be used in place of white sugar.

Turbinado
Turbinado sugar is crystallized sugar made from sugar cane extract. It is similar to brown sugar, although paler with larger crystals, and may be used interchangeably. It comes from the initial pressing of sugar cane, where white sugar is further refined. It is often sold in the United States as Sugar in the Raw. Though it is slightly less processed than white sugar, it still has the same negative health effects as white sugar.

Understanding Artificial Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners, also called sugar substitutes, are chemically processed substances that are used instead of sucrose (sugar) to sweeten foods and beverages.

Food manufacturers began using artificial sweeteners to reduce the amount of calories in products while retaining their sweetness.

Artificial sweeteners are worse than real sugar. Besides being chemically processed (which is a nutritional no-no) sugar substitutes trick your body into overeating (by interfering with your satiety hormones), contribute to weight gain, kill off good gut bacteria, are linked to disease and because they're significantly sweeter than sugar – they dull your taste buds and foster greater sweet cravings without ever actually satisfying your sweet tooth!

There are currently, five artificial sweeteners are approved by the FDA:²

1. Aspartame, sold under the brand names NutraSweet® and Equal®
2. Saccharin, sold under the brand name Sweet’N Low®
3. Sucralose, sold under the brand name Splenda®
4. Acesulfame K (or acesulfame potassium), produced by Hoechst, a German chemical company; widely used in foods, beverages and pharmaceutical products around the world.
5. Neotame, produced by the NutraSweet Company; the most recent addition to FDA’s list of approved artificial sweeteners, neotame is used in diet soft drinks and low-calorie foods.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) cautions everyone to avoid artificial sweeteners because they are unsafe when consumed in large amounts and are very poorly tested.
Aspartame is of particular concern because it contains phenylalanine (50%), aspartic acid (40%) and methanol (10%), three well-recognized neurotoxins. Aspartame is also a carcinogen and accounts for more reports of adverse reactions than all other food additives combined. The following symptoms have been associated with the consumption of aspartame:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
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<th>Symptom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>migraines</td>
<td>nausea</td>
<td>fibromyalgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>hearing loss</td>
<td>dizziness</td>
<td>insomnia</td>
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<tr>
<td>blurred vision</td>
<td>multiple sclerosis</td>
<td>hallucinations</td>
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<tr>
<td>brain tumors</td>
<td>lymphoma</td>
<td>Alzheimer's</td>
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<tr>
<td>short-term memory loss</td>
<td>slurred speech</td>
<td>mild to suicidal depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personality changes</td>
<td>violent episodes</td>
<td>Parkinson's</td>
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<tr>
<td>anxiety attacks</td>
<td>hyperactivity</td>
<td>heart arrhythmia</td>
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<tr>
<td>edema or swelling</td>
<td>gastrointestinal disorders</td>
<td>seizures(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skin lesions</td>
<td>muscle cramps</td>
<td>joint pains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chronic fatigue</td>
<td>PMS</td>
<td>menstrual irregularities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chest pain</td>
<td>increased appetite</td>
<td>numbness and tingling of extremities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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More recently, stevia-based sweeteners in the form of Truvia and PureVia are replacing aspartame sweetened products. However, due to health concerns cited in literature\(^5\) the FDA has not approved the use of Truvia, a sweet-tasting compound found in products like Coca-Cola, Cargill and PureVia, typically found in PepsiCo products, as safe food additives.

1. About Sugar – The American Heart Association
2. Artificial sweeteners: Understanding these and other sugar substitutes. – Mayo Clinic
3. Aspartame: The Real Story – foodandhealing.com, Annemarie Colbin, PhD
4. Aspartame promotes grand mal seizures, say health experts – NaturalNews.com
5. Toxicology of Rebaudioside: A Review – Sarah Kobylewski and Curtis D. Eckhert, PhD; UCLA