

Sugars Fact Sheet

Naturally occurring or added, sugar exists in abundance in the food supply. **Small changes** such as limiting food and drinks with added sugars will make a **big difference** to your health.



80

PERCENT

The amount of sugar Australia exports each year.¹

Sugar

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate and is found in abundance in our food supply. Sugar is either naturally occurring or is added to food and drinks.



Natural sugars

Sugar exists naturally in foods such as fruit, honey and milk. Sugar is the simplest form of carbohydrate so it provides a quick, simple source of energy.

However, naturally occurring sugars in foods usually co-exist with other important vitamins and minerals. For example, fruit contains sugar but also fibre, while milk contains sugar but also calcium and protein. Therefore, in the context of whole foods, naturally occurring sugars offer additional nutrient benefits.

However, everything in moderation of course; especially when it comes to honey. Although a natural source, honey is still sugar, and unlike the previous examples, honey does not provide additional nutritional benefits.

Consuming too much sugar has been associated with increased risk of tooth decay and overweight and obesity. It is for this reason that the Australian Dietary Guidelines urge caution and recommend that Australians limit their intake of foods and drinks containing added sugars.

Added sugars

Added sugars, as the name suggests, are added to food and drinks such as soft drinks, high-energy snack foods, fast food and confectionery. Sugars are used by food manufacturers because they improve taste, colour and increase the shelf life of food and drink products.

However, added sugars are often found in food and drinks that do not contain valuable nutrients, vitamins or minerals. Soft drinks, high-energy snack foods, fast food and confectionery are typically high in energy (kilojoules), fat (total and saturated), sugar and salt. These types of foods, especially those high in sugar have been associated with increased risk of dental caries, overweight and obesity.



Honey

Honey is made by bees using the nectar from flowers. Honey bees transform nectar into honey by a process of regurgitation and evaporation. They store it as a primary food source in wax honeycombs inside their beehive.

Brown sugar

Brown sugars are granulated sugars with the grains coated in molasses to produce a light, dark or demerara sugar.

Sugar cubes

Sugar cubes are white or brown granulated sugars pressed together in block shape.

White sugar

White sugar can be granulated or milled. Granulated white sugar is generally used as a 'tabletop' sugar - sprinkled on foods, added to hot drinks or used for cooking or baking purposes.



Type of added sugars

Added sugars present an additional challenge because in food and drinks, they are given a whole range of different names including:

- Brown sugar
- Caster sugar
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Corn syrup
- Demerara sugar
- Dextrose
- Fructose
- Glucose
- Glucose syrup
- Golden syrup
- Honey
- Icing sugar
- Invert sugar
- Lactose
- Maple syrup
- Molasses
- Malt
- Malt extract
- Raw sugar
- Sucrose
- Treacle
- White sugar

The important point to remember is that all of these are types of sugar, the simplest form of carbohydrate and they all are all a source of energy (kilojoules).

The differences between these types of sugars are a result of the level of processing or the existence of other ingredients. For example, white sugar is much coarser than caster sugar due to differences in the sugar crystal size as a result of processing. The colour of brown sugar is due to the presence of molasses and dark brown sugar contains a greater content of molasses compared to light brown sugar.

The ingredients list and added sugars

Checking the ingredients list on a packaged food or drink is a good way to decide whether a food or drink contains added sugars.

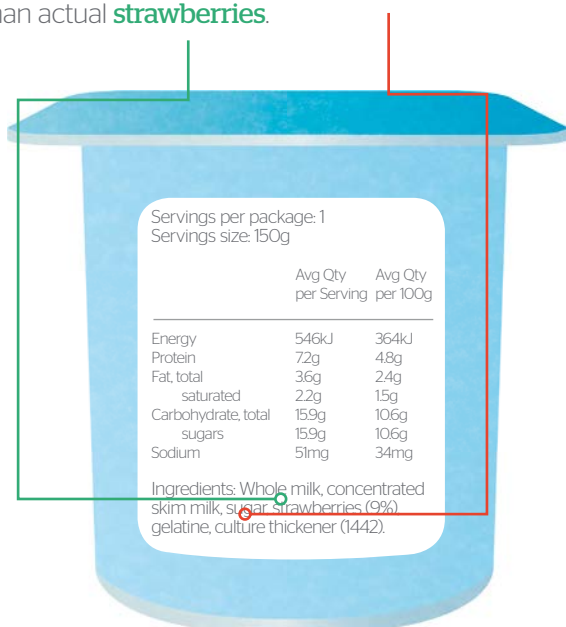
Under Australian law, food and drink packages must contain an ingredients list. This is usually found on the back of the food or drink's label.

Ingredients must be listed in descending order (by ingoing weight). This means that the ingredient listed first contributes the largest amount to the product, while the ingredient listed last contributes the least, and so on.

Strawberry yoghurt - example 1

In this strawberry yoghurt example, sugar is listed, before strawberries.

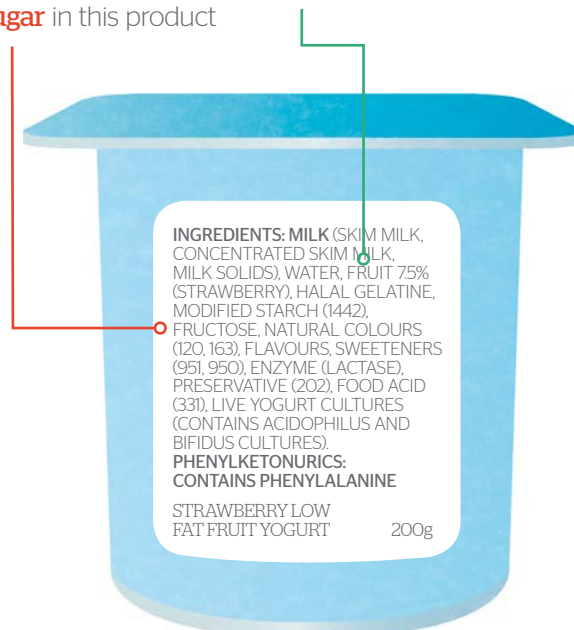
This means there is more added **sugar** in this product than actual **strawberries**.



Strawberry yoghurt - example 2

In this strawberry yoghurt example, there is still added sugar, but fruit is listed before sugar.

This means there is more **fruit** than added **sugar** in this product



Alternative sugars

There are a range of alternative sugars available, often marketed as 'smart', 'low GI' or 'organic'. Although these varieties appear to have added benefits, such as a low glycaemic index, they still have the same energy (kilojoule) content as regular sugar.

For products that contain sweeteners, refer to the sweeteners fact sheet.

The 'take home' message

Food and drinks that contain naturally occurring sugars, such as fruit and milk should be consumed in moderation. The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend 2 serves of fruit and 2.5 serves of reduced fat milk, yoghurt or cheese per day.

Food and drinks that contain added sugars, such as soft drinks, high-energy snack foods, fast food and confectionery, should be limited.