

healthy

LIVING

SUGAR

JUST HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

When it comes to the latest information in nutrition, sugar has been grabbing most of the media headlines. Arguments from leading dietitians and nutritionists range from some saying sugar is something so toxic we should avoid it at all costs, to others considering sugar a natural product that is ok in moderation. It is safe to say that this lack of clarity amongst professionals is confusing for most people and leaves a lot of questions to be answered.

Two of the most glaring questions are:

- 1. What exactly is moderation?**
- 2. What is the impact of too much dietary sugar?**

Now who you ask will determine what answer you get to both of these questions, so it really does pay to look at the source of your information and assess what benefit they may gain by their response. This article has tried to source the most independent and up to date answers available.

Perhaps the largest global health authority - the World Health Organisation (WHO) an agency of the United Nations - have recently come up with a revised draft recommendation for the reduction of dietary sugar intake. They propose that no more than 5% of our total daily calorie intake come from sugar - this is a reduction from the previous maximum recommendation of 10%. For the average adult this equates to around 25g or 6 teaspoons of sugar per day and includes sugar in the form of sucrose (table sugar), glucose and fructose; as well as natural sugars found in honey, fruit juices and fruit concentrates. This limit leaves little room for obvious sources such as sweets, soda and processed foods - especially when you consider that a single can of sugar sweetened soda contains up to 40g (10 teaspoons) of sugar in one serving.



The reason for the WHO revised sugar recommendations is because of the concerning impact of sugar on our health and the burden this is placing on the health care system of industrialised nations, not to mention the problems in lower income countries that don't have public or affordable health care. Rapidly increasing health problems associated with excessive sugar intake include:

- **Diabetes** - over 225,000 people have diabetes and 50 more people are diagnosed every day in New Zealand
- **Dental caries** - 50% of kiwi kids aged 5 years have dental caries with many having surgery under general anaesthetic to have decayed teeth removed. The main reason for this problem is diet - 26% of their total sugar is in the form of sweet beverages (soft drinks, juices and cordials)
- **Obesity** - globally there are 2.1 billion people either overweight or obese. In NZ that statistic is 2 out of every 3 adults, and 1 out of every 3 children.
- **Heart disease** - still the leading cause of death in NZ, accounting for 30% of deaths annually, or one person every 90 minutes. An Otago University study in 2014 found that sugar has a direct effect on risk factors for heart disease, specifically lipids and blood pressure.

Obviously it's not just the rising cost of health care for these conditions, but there are also very strong negative implications for individuals, families and communities.

So just how does your diet and health stack up? Many of us who eat what we consider to be a reasonable diet and take regular exercise might just think we're doing ok, and maybe we are. But as Nigel Latta, a New Zealand psychologist, author and documentary host found out, maybe we're not. Nigel put his diet and his health under the microscope and found that he was eating too much sugar and that it was increasing his risk for heart disease and stroke, despite the fact that he was slim and exercised regularly. This is a documentary that everyone should take the time to watch (if you haven't already), it reviews the amount of sugar in common foods and the impact it is having on the health, communities and economy in New Zealand. It can be found on TVNZ OnDemand "Nigel Latta: Is Sugar The New Fat?" (link in resources).

Before any of us apply a whole new dietary or health regime, it's a good idea to stop and take stock of our current situation to see where changes (if any) need to be made. One of the simplest and probably most dramatic changes we can make is to reduce the sugar we add to our food, and to cut down or even better, cut out sweetened beverages such as soda and fruit juice.



(Resources)

WHO <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2014/consultation-sugar-guideline/en/>

WHO http://www.who.int/nutrition/sugars_public_consultation/en/
Diabetes New Zealand http://www.diabetes.org.nz/about_diabetes

Bach K, Manton D. 'Early childhood caries: A New Zealand perspective' *Journal of Prime Health Care* June 2014, 6(2):169-174 [available: <https://www.rnzcgp.org.nz/assets/documents/Publications/JPHC/June-2014/JPHCViewpointJune2014.pdf>]

New Zealand Ministry of Health 'Admissions to New Zealand Public Hospitals for Dental Care: A 20-year review' 18 February 2014, Available: [http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/admissions-new-](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/admissions-new-zealand-public-hospitals-dental-care-20-year-review)

[zealand-public-hospitals-dental-care-20-year-review](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/admissions-new-zealand-public-hospitals-dental-care-20-year-review)

New Zealand Ministry of Health 'New Zealand Health Survey: Annual update of key findings 2012/13' 12 December 2013 <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/new-zealand-health-survey-annual-update-key-findings-2012-13>

Heart Foundation 'General Heart Statistics' <http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/know-the-facts/statistics>

Otago University news 'Otago study finds sugar implicated in cardiovascular disease risk' 16 May 2014 <http://www.otago.ac.nz/news/news/otago070760.html>

Nigel Latta: 'Is Sugar The New Fat?' <http://tvnz.co.nz/nigel-latta/s1-ep6-video-6060553>