



We have all heard how too much sugar can lead to obesity and other long-term health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease. But is this true of **all** sugar? The truth is less straightforward than you might think!

Project Food are here to try and help to make it slightly easier to understand. We're going to be taking a look at the different kinds of sugar and some easy 'swaps' over the next couple of newsletters, starting with a look at the two main different 'types' of sugar.

**With very best wishes,
Hannah and the Project Food team**

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Focus on...Sugar

Not all sugars are created equal

It's really important – though admittedly, not easy! – to understand the difference between **free sugar** (also known as **added sugar**) and sugar that is **naturally present** in foods. This is because we only need to focus on cutting down free sugars.



When it comes to our health, the difference between free sugars and naturally present sugars is that foods high in naturally present sugars almost always contain fibre, vitamins, minerals and water, all of which are good for us. But foods that are high in free sugars tend to be low in fibre and other nutrients, and therefore contain 'empty calories' with little nutritional value. Free sugars are also absorbed into the bloodstream very rapidly, which can cause energy swings and contribute to insulin resistance and diabetes – and they are also big culprits when it comes to obesity and tooth decay.

This means that we need to think about the food itself, and the kind of sugar it contains, not just about sugar.

What is free sugar?

Free sugar is sugar that is added to food – this includes table sugar, golden syrup and the sugar in cakes, biscuits, pastries and other processed foods – and sugar that is found honey and syrups.

But free sugar does not include any sugar that is naturally present in foods, such as the lactose in milk (or unsweetened yoghurt) and the fructose in whole unprocessed fruits and vegetables. So foods like sweetcorn and peas are relatively high in sugar, but we do not need to eat less of them because the sugar is not free sugar (and it is accompanied by important vitamins and minerals that are good for our health).



What about fruit juice?

The sugar in a whole piece of fruit – such as a whole orange – is not a free sugar, and we can eat as many whole oranges as we like! Whole oranges also contain fibre. But the sugar in fruit juice – where the sugar has been extracted from the orange itself – is free sugar, and so we should limit our intake of fruit juice; one serving per day is about the right amount.



Which foods are high in free sugar?

This can be tricky to work out! We all know that cakes, biscuits, pastries, sweets and sugary drinks will be high in free (or added) sugar, but with other foods it can be less obvious. For example, manufacturers will often add free sugars to foods like canned soups, fruit yoghurts, flavoured waters, ready meals and even bread – to make their products taste ‘better’.

What about ‘natural’ sugars?

As we have said, some sugars are naturally present in foods like fruit and vegetables. But there are also sugars that are described as ‘natural’ but are actually free sugars, which can be very confusing! This includes honey and syrups such as corn syrup, agave nectar and brown rice syrup, as well as ‘healthier’-sounding sugars like coconut sugar, muscovado sugar and molasses.



In next month’s newsletter we’ll look at a few ways to make it easier to eat less sugar, as well as labels and sugar swaps. Meanwhile, below is a delicious recipe for a low sugar apple and cinnamon muffins. Although we have reduced the sugar in this recipe, we think they are still delicious—let us know what you think!

Apple & Cinnamon Muffins

Makes approx 6

Ingredients

140g self-raising flour
55g sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 cooking or eating apple, peeled and grated
90ml vegetable oil
1 medium egg, beaten
65ml milk



Method

Preheat oven to 170°C/ gas mark 4

1. Mix all the dry ingredients (flour, sugar, cinnamon and grated apple) together thoroughly in a large bowl.
2. Mix together the oil, beaten eggs and milk in another bowl or jug and then stir into the dry ingredients. Try not to overmix or your muffins may be tough!
3. Spoon into muffin cases and bake in the oven for 20 minutes.
4. Test if ready by putting a skewer or thin knife into the middle of cake and if it comes out dry it is cooked, if it comes out with cake mix still attached it needs a few more minutes in the oven.