

How much sugar are we really consuming?



We are often told we eat too much sugar and our desire for all things sweet and sugary is making us fat. But how much is too much? Will reducing our sugar intake stop us from gaining weight? While obesity across the world continues to rise, we cannot assume the same is true for sugar intake. In this information sheet, we look a little more closely at the data.

Measuring sugar intakes

National Surveys

Data on what we eat is collected by the Government in a large national survey in which thousands of people participate. Detailed information on food and drink eaten, physical activity and other health information is collected by trained researchers by phone or by interview. In Australia and New Zealand these surveys are carried out every couple of years.

Apparent Consumption

Apparent consumption is the total amount of sugar sold for household or commercial use, which includes:

1. 'Loose' table sugar
2. Sugar added to manufactured food and drinks, takeaways and restaurant meals
3. Imports and exports of sugar

This way of measuring consumption looks at what is available for consumption, not actual intake.

Added Sugars

The data on added sugar consumption in Australia was determined through a 10-step classification process – a methodology recently devised by researchers. This method was used to estimate added and free sugar values of food products on the Australian Food Nutrient Database (NUTTAB) and then used in the analysis of dietary intake data collected in the 2011-12 Australian Health Survey. Prior to this, dietary surveys have been unable to quantify added sugar consumption as there are no analytical methods that distinguish between sugar added to foods by manufacturers and sugars inherent in foods.

How much are we eating?

- In New Zealand the figure was 48 grams per day (median value for sucrose) in 2009. This is about 9% of the total kilojoules consumed per day coming from sucrose.
- In Australia, the mean daily added sugar intake was 52 grams per day, contributing 9.5% of total energy intake in 2011/12.



Where is sugar in our diets?

82% of free sugars were from discretionary or "junk" foods. This supports the previous data released by the ABS which showed, on average, around 35% of our total energy intake comes from discretionary foods.

The main sources of free sugars in the Australian diet were:

- Soft drinks and sports drinks (19%)
- Pastries, biscuits, cakes, muffins, scones and cake-type desserts (14%)
- Fruit juice and fruit drinks (13%)
- Sugar, honey and syrups (11.6%)
- Confectionary and cereal/nut/fruit/seed bars (8.7%)



DID YOU KNOW?

Whilst sugar intake has declined since 1995, 10% more adults are now classified as overweight or obese.



Definitions

Total Sugars includes those sugars naturally present in foods such as fruit and milk as well as the sugars added in processed foods and beverages

Added sugars: All monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods by the manufacturer, cook, or consumer.

Free sugars: Includes all added sugars plus the sugars naturally present in honey, syrups and fruit juices.



How does our intake compare with recommendations?

Outside of the Australian Dietary Guidelines to 'limit foods containing added sugars', Australia does not have recommendations for intake of added or free sugars. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends less than 10% of total energy comes from free sugars.

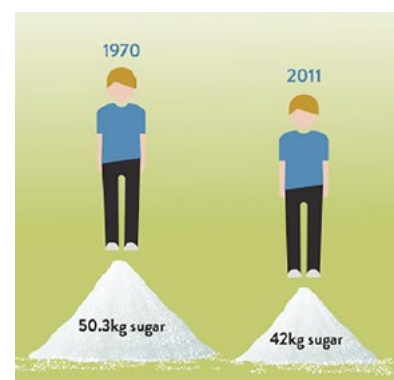
Australians came close to meeting the WHO recommendations for free sugars. Mean usual intake

was 10.9% compared to 10% recommended. This equals 14 teaspoons vs 13 teaspoons. Overall, 52% of people exceed the WHO recommendations however it is unclear by how much the recommendation is exceeded.

According to the last national nutrition survey in New Zealand, mean added sugar intakes were about 9-10% of energy – very similar to intakes in Australia.

What is the trend in sugar consumption?

- In New Zealand, sucrose intake has fallen from about 54g per day in 1997 to about 49g per day in 2008.
- In Australia, **added sugars** intake declined for the total population (aged 2 years and over) from 66 grams per day or 11.2% of energy in 1995 to 52 grams per day or 9.5% of energy in 2011/12.



This supports apparent consumption data released in 2015 which found sugar consumption in Australia has dropped by 16.5% between 1970 and 2011.

THE SHORT AND SWEET OF IT

Obesity rates may be soaring but the same is not necessarily true for sugar intakes

1. Consumption data comes from analysis of national nutrition surveys and apparent consumption data. A new methodology has also allowed added sugar consumption data to be obtained in Australia.
2. In New Zealand and Australia total sugar intake has declined since the mid-nineties. Apparent consumption has also fallen since 1970.
3. Both Australia and New Zealand come close to meeting the WHO recommendations for free sugars.
4. 82% of free sugar intake comes from discretionary or "junk" foods in our diet.
5. The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends "limiting food containing added sugars"
6. Obesity rates must be attributed to a range of factors rather than just one food ingredient such as sugar.

Information based on an overview of the scientific evidence.
For individual health advice see a qualified health professional.

Further Reading

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian health survey: Nutrition First Results – Food and Nutrition, 2011–12. May 2014
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6. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Dietary Guidelines. Canberra, ACT; 2013
7. University of Otago and Ministry of Health. A Focus on Nutrition: Key findings of the 2008/09 New Zealand Adult Nutrition Survey. Wellington: Ministry of Health; 2011.

More info available at
www.allaboutsugars.com

This resource has been developed by the Australian Sugar Industry Alliance and aims to provide science based information on sugars and health.

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