

# Sugar, vitamins & minerals



**Do you enjoy a diet packed with calcium-rich yogurt and fibre-filled breakfast cereal?** Have you considered that it's the sugar in these foods that helps us to enjoy them so much? We hear reports about how sugar is only 'empty kilojoules' and 'dilutes' nutrients in the diet, but is this really the case?

## DID YOU KNOW?

Research confirms that in general our intake of vitamins and minerals is maintained across a range of sugar intakes, so you can enjoy a little sugar and still be healthy.



## Is sugar just 'empty kilojoules'?

The idea that sugar is just 'empty kilojoules' stems from the fact that sugar is a carbohydrate which contains no other vitamins and minerals. As such, it has been said that the more sugar someone consumes, the lower the intake of vitamins and minerals, a theory known as "micronutrient dilution."

Sugar is a source of energy, like all carbohydrates, and it is a key ingredient in many foods that provide essential vitamins and minerals. Sugar helps to make a wide range of healthy foods palatable, which we might otherwise not eat.

Recent reviews suggest that although a micronutrient dilution effect may exist at very high intakes of sugars (i.e. > 20-25% of energy from added sugars), micronutrient intake is usually adequate, with sugars consumption having a relatively minor impact on diet quality compared with total energy intake.

As such, emphasis should be placed on consuming a variety of foods from the five food groups to ensure an adequate intake of vitamins and minerals.

## A bland diet without sugar

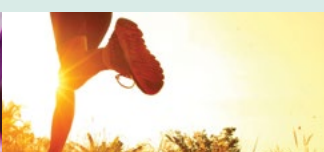
A diet with zero sugar is likely to be so bland and unappealing that we would not be able to sustain it for very long. Sugar is added to foods for a number of reasons such as improving shelf life and taste. A key benefit of sugar is that it helps to make healthy, nutritious food more enjoyable and improves the variety of foods we eat.

For example, sugar is added to many types of yoghurt. Without it, yoghurt

would be sour and we might be less likely to eat it on a regular basis. By including something sweet, like fruit, it is far tastier and we can get the full benefit of the essential nutrients it provides including protein and calcium.

Also, the addition of sugar to breakfast cereals makes them palatable and allows us to not only enjoy them but also gain the positive health benefits. A new analysis of ABS data found that total sugars in breakfast cereals account for less than 2% of total energy in the diets of Australians and when

compared to people who ate other breakfasts, those who ate breakfast cereals had: the same daily energy intake but significantly higher intakes of iron, calcium, fibre, folate and magnesium; lower intakes of sodium; and were more likely to meet their nutrient needs.



## Sugar as part of a balanced diet

Sugar can be part of a healthy, balanced diet provided that your individual energy requirements are met. Sugar in your diet does not necessarily mean you are getting less vitamins or minerals from the food you eat with research showing that most people have the recommended amount of vitamins and minerals even though they may have different levels of sugar intake. A diet insufficient in vitamins and minerals is likely due to a poor diet overall and cannot be related to sugar intake alone.



## Will reducing sugar improve my diet?

Eating less sugar is not a guarantee for more vitamins and minerals. It is important to focus on the overall kilojoule content and nutritional quality of foods eaten throughout the day rather than just sugar intake alone.

Nutrition experts suggest that the best way to achieve a healthy diet and increase your intake of vitamins and minerals is to enjoy a variety of food from the five food groups daily.

Experts from the European Food Safety Authority said that:

*“Observed negative associations between added sugar intake and micronutrient density of the diet are mainly related to patterns of intake of the foods from which added sugars in the diet are derived rather than to intake of added sugars per se”*



## THE SHORT AND SWEET OF IT

**Sugar is an important part of our diet, offering more than ‘empty kilojoules’**

1. Sugar can help us make healthier food choices by making nutrient-packed foods enjoyable. These include fortified breakfast cereals and calcium-rich yoghurts.
2. Nutrition experts advise that we can increase our level of vitamins and minerals by enjoying a wide range of foods rather than focusing only on our sugar intake.

**You can enjoy sugar in moderation as part of a healthy, balanced diet**

1. By watching the overall kilojoule content of your diet, including a wide variety of foods, and exercising regularly, you can enjoy sugar in moderation as part of your healthy lifestyle.

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

### Further Reading

1. Gibson SA. Dietary sugars intake and micronutrient adequacy: a systematic review of the evidence. *Nutr Res Rev* 2007; 20, 121-31.
2. Ruxton CH, Gardner EJ, McNulty HM. Is sugar consumption detrimental to health? A review of the evidence 1995-2006. *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr*. 2010; 50, 1-19.
3. Nutrition Research Australia. Breakfast and Breakfast Cereal Consumption Among Australians – A secondary analysis of the 2011-12 National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey. 2016.
4. European Food Safety Authority. Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for carbohydrates and dietary fibre. *EFSA Journal*. 2010; 8(3): 1462 (77pp)
5. Louie JC, Tapsell LC. Intake of total and added sugars and nutrient dilution in Australian children and adolescents. *Br J Nutr*. 2015 Aug. DOI:10.1017/S0007114515003542.

More info available at  
[www.allaboutsugars.com](http://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.

Copyright © 2016, All rights reserved.