



“The average Australian now consumes about 27 teaspoons of sugar per day”

sweet talk

Controlling the sugar in your diet involves more than cutting down on lollies and drinking unsweetened tea and coffee – you also need to watch out for the white stuff where you wouldn't expect to find it

WE ALL KNOW SUGARY FOODS are bad for our health and our waistline. For many of us, biscuits have been consigned to the 'just the one' pile, and chocolate has become a weekly treat. But what if you were eating spoonfuls of sugar without even realising?

It could easily be the case, with new research showing the amount in food has doubled over the last 30 years. According to *The Composition of Foods*, a handbook by the UK's Food Standards Agency dedicated to monitoring the nutritional value of foods, more and more of the sweet stuff is being added to packaged and tinned goods, especially savoury items such as wholemeal bread and tomato soup.

It also discovered some of the biggest increases in sugar have been in breakfast cereal. In 1978 Kellogg's Special K contained 9.6g of sugar per 100g. It has now risen to almost 15g. And the amount in a typical loaf of wholemeal bread rose from 2.1g per 100g in 1978 to 2.8g per 100g in 2002.

Nutrition Australia senior nutritionist Aloysa Hourigan says consuming too many hidden sugar stores is affecting our health.

"It's adding to our energy intake and contributing to the obesity epidemic," she says. "Sugar flew under the radar with the low-fat debate, but now it's back in the limelight."

Sticky facts

All this sweetening up means the average Australian now consumes about 43kg of sugar per year, or 27 teaspoons per day, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Many of us don't realise that a tablespoon of tomato sauce contains a teaspoon of sugar, and a 375ml can of soft drink contains 10 teaspoons.

"You just don't expect to find sugar in

savoury items, such as a Cup-a-Soup or Asian sauces," says Aloysa. "Jars of minced garlic and ginger contain it. And be suspicious when something is toasted, such as muesli, as sugar is used to caramelise the oats."

Lydia Buchtmann, spokesperson for Food Standards Australia New Zealand, explored the subject while writing *Choosing The Right Stuff*, a guide to food additives and labels. She says sugar is often added when fat is reduced.

"The key foods to look at are those labelled 'low fat'. Check how much sugar is added," she says, explaining that it can also be labelled as 'sucrose' or 'dextrose'. "Research shows people focus on one ingredient. They look at the fat content, but forget the sugar."

Better choices?

Connie Bennett, author of *Sugar Shock!*, has spent the last five years researching the issue. She says adding honey to your tea is no better than sweetening with sugar, and that brown sugar affects you in the same way as white.

"It is metabolised just like sucrose," she explains. "It raises blood sugar levels rapidly, upsets mineral relationships and suppresses the immune system."

An article in the *British Medical Journal* in 2005, stated, "Sugar is as dangerous as tobacco and, in terms of world health, far more important... it could be time to move with expert opinion and de-sugar your diet".

Aloysa advises going back to basics. "You can avoid a lot of sugar if you prepare more food from scratch. It's fine to use a bottled sauce occasionally, just not every night."

The simple message is, eat more fish, fruit, vegies, pulses and wholegrains, adds Lydia. "The more of these you eat, the less high-sugar foods you'll consume." ❄️

HIGH FIVE

These foods could add more sugar to your diet than you realise, says nutritionist Aloysa Hourigan.

1 Breakfast cereal

Aloysa recommends looking for a cereal with less than 10g of sugar per 100g. "Special K has more, whereas Weet-Bix contains almost no added sugar," she says.

2 Bread Most breads need to contain some sugar, but it should only be a little. "Levels in many pre-packaged loaves have increased. Read the labels and go for a low-sugar brand."

3 Bottled sauces

"Watch out for stir-fry and casserole sauces. They can contain up to 30g of sugar per 100g," warns Aloysa. She adds that even savoury sauces, such as satay, can be packed with sugar.

4 Tinned soup

This is another savoury item you might not expect to contain sugar. "Many tomato soups have high levels. Manufacturers have added more and more, and we've become used to the sweet taste."

5 Cup-a-Soup

Rely on this convenience food and you'll consume lots of extra sugar. "One-minute-noodles are a better choice," says Aloysa.