

Can eating sugar cause cancer?

8 January 2018, by Siddhi Shroff

A recent study published by Belgian biologists found a relationship between glucose (sugar) and the activation of a gene that stimulates the growth of cancer cells. This led to public fear that everything with sugar should be avoided as it will cause or "feed" cancer.

While these results have many implications for future research, it is important to remember that this one study was done in a laboratory environment and it is not enough evidence to apply it to changes in the human diet or to the general population.

But this has led to a public understanding that one should be cutting carbs and avoiding any and all sugars in the diet. This is not necessarily true. Another common misconception is that patients should avoid all sugars throughout cancer treatment.

Our body needs energy; the carbohydrates in the [food](#) we eat break down to glucose, the [sugar](#) that is the main source of energy for the body. All cells require this energy in order for the body to function effectively. While a form of sugar is naturally found in fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy foods, these foods offer more beneficial nutrients than highly processed foods with added sugars.

Added sugars are what you want to limit or avoid. These are the sweeteners that are added to food during processing. Unlike the foods mentioned above, added sugars are not nutrient dense with essential vitamins and minerals, and they provide empty calories.

Added sugars usually come from sweetened beverages (soft drinks, coffee, tea, energy drinks), candy, cakes, cookies, pies, pastries, doughnuts, Jams, jellies, syrups, sweet toppings and more.

These foods are higher in calories. Excess caloric intake can lead to weight gain and obesity, which has been shown to be a risk for many cancers.

So, how much of added sugar is OK to eat?

According to the American Heart Association, women should aim to consume around 6 teaspoons of added sugar per day and men should aim for no more than 9 teaspoons of added sugar per day.

You can limit your intake of added sugars by:

- Drinking water and unsweetened coffee/tea, instead of sodas and other sweetened beverages.
- Choose beverages like low-fat milk or 100 percent fruit juice, which will also help you to meet dairy and fruit group recommendation for daily intake.
- Choose fruit as a naturally sweet dessert or snack instead of foods with added sugars.
- Making sweet desserts a "once-in-a-while" treat and eating smaller portions.
- Buying packaged foods from the store that have little to no [added sugars](#): plain yogurt, unsweetened applesauce, frozen [fruit](#) with no added sugar or syrups.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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