

Are Your Kids ^{too} Sweet?

Cheryl Meyer serves up the amounts of sugar recommended for children, especially with summer holidays just around the corner.

Holiday eating often begins well before the actual occasion arrives, with a variety of parties and get-togethers filling the calendar between the start of the school holidays and New Year's Day. It can be far too easy for kids to develop unhealthy eating habits that will be challenging to break once the season has ended.

sugar content of a variety of foods		
Product	Portion size	Amount of sugar
Fizzy drink, e.g. Coca Cola	340 ml can	8 – 9 teaspoons
Sports drink, e.g. Energade	500 ml bottle	7 teaspoons
Cordial, e.g. Oros	300 ml (ready-to-drink)	4 – 6 teaspoons
Iced tea	340 ml can	6 teaspoons
Flavoured water	500 ml bottle	5 teaspoons
Sweetened breakfast cereal, e.g. Coco Pops	A cup (250 ml)	3 – 4 teaspoons
Unsweetened breakfast cereals, e.g. Bran Flakes	A cup (250 ml)	½ - 1 teaspoon
Baked muesli	1 cup (250 ml)	6 teaspoons
Low fat drinking yoghurt	250 ml bottle	6 teaspoons
Flavoured milk, e.g. Milo	300 ml bottle	3 teaspoons
Low fat yoghurt	A tub (100 ml)	1 teaspoon
Jam/marmalade	2 teaspoons	3 – 4 teaspoons
Average-sized		
chocolate bar	50 g	5 – 6 teaspoons
Bite-sized chocolate bar	12 – 22 g	1 – 2 teaspoons
Chocolate cake/muffin	1 slice	3 teaspoons
Doughnut with icing	1	3 teaspoons
Jelly sweets	A small packet (75 g)	12 teaspoons
Tomato sauce	1 tablespoon	1¾ teaspoons

* 1 teaspoon = 5 g sugar

“High intakes of added sugar push more nutritious foods off children's plates.”

“It can be far too easy for kids to develop unhealthy eating habits that will be challenging to break once the season has ended.”

How much sugar should kids be eating?

The Healthy Active Kids South Africa (HAKSA) Report Card 2014 states that children typically have 50 g (10 teaspoons) of sugar each day, which well exceeds the 15 g (3 teaspoons) recommended maximum daily limit for children. Over the festive season, it can be all too easy for your toddler's sugar intake to creep up.

A quick look at the sugar content of foods may be an eye-opening realisation of how much sugar kids actually consume.

The implications of high sugar intake

High intakes of added sugar push more nutritious foods off children's plates. Children with the highest level of added sugar intake have been found to have the lowest consumption of most nutrients and servings of grains, vegetables, fruits, and dairy.

tips to cut back on sugar over the holidays

- Read the labels on the foods that your kids are eating, so that you can start eliminating the really unhealthy items.
- Limit fizzy drinks, energy drinks, sports drinks, cordial and juice. Instead, opt for water to quench your child's thirst.
- Between meals, give your kids snacks made up of fresh fruit, nuts, seeds, portable veggies (like carrots and celery), yoghurt, or cheese and crackers instead of sweet biscuits, chocolate or muffins.
- Go homemade: in most baked goods you can reduce the amount of sugar by half and intensify the sweetness by adding vanilla, nutmeg or cinnamon.
- Try frozen fruit. There are lots of yummy options, such as blueberries, raspberries and peaches. These frozen fruits often do not have any added sugar (but check the label to make sure) and are very healthy and refreshing on a hot day.
- Even though fruit yoghurt, flavoured milk, canned fruit, and jam may be considered healthier options for your child's palate, check that their sugar content doesn't exceed the daily recommended amount.
- Walk the talk: monitor what you eat and drink because your kids see what you consume and will want to mimic you. In other words, be a strong, healthy role model to your little ones. While your kids might not eat everything that you eat, they will follow your lead. ♥

label lookout

- Look for the carbohydrates (of which sugars) figure on food nutrition labels.
- More than 22.5 g of total sugars for every 100 g is high sugar content
- 5 g of total sugars or less for every 100 g is low sugar content

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cheryl Meyer is a Registered Dietitian at The Health & Lifestyle Consultancy in Bryanston.