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Replacing Sugar

According to the *American Heart Association*, the average North American consumes 22 teaspoons of added a sugar a day. That is equivalent to 355 calories a day, or an **extra 22-28 pounds a year to the waistline!**

While some of this sugar comes from sources that we are aware of, and perhaps even consciously add to our food (such as in our morning cup of joe), a majority of these sugars are actually hiding in our foods. Hiding and waiting for us to innocently pick them up in the grocery store and put them in our buggy.

This often-unnecessary ingredient has been proven to alter our taste buds so that we are unable to respond to the normal flavour of foods anymore. This dulling of our taste buds then, in return, has us craving more sugar. It's a nasty little cycle, but it can be broken with a few simple steps.

The first step is to avoid being ambushed by sugar in your grocer's aisle and start reading your food labels, in particular the grams of sugar per serving. For every 3 grams of sugar listed, you are ingesting 1 teaspoon of sugar.

The second step is to completely eliminate high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) from any food product that you purchase. HFCS can really mess up your metabolism, and has been linked to diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, metabolic syndrome, osteoporosis and cancer. But buyers beware - the manufacturers also label this sugar as fructose-glucose, inulin, iso-glucose, dahlia syrup, tapioca syrup, glucose syrup, corn syrup, crystalline fructose, agave syrup, and even fruit fructose.

The third and final step is to replace sugar with other sources that aren't as hard on the body. One word of advice, though - while these sources are cleaner than sugar, they can still lead to additional pounds if not closely monitored.

Sugar Alternatives:

Sucanat

The name stands for **S**ugar **C**ane **N**atural, and it is a natural sweetener made from crushing the sugar cane, extracting the juice and drying it. It has a natural molasses flavour and can be substituted for sugar in any recipe. Sucanat is an excellent source of calcium, iron, vitamin B6, potassium and chromium.

Agave or Agave Nectar

Agave syrup or nectar is a sweetener produced from the native agave plant of Mexico. The core of the plant contains a juice that is squeezed out, filtered and heated resulting in a syrup-like product. It is a perfect alternative to white, refined sugar and can be substituted as follows: one-third cup of agave for every one cup of white sugar.

Organic Maple Syrup

Maple syrup contains the trace mineral manganese, important for energy production, and it is also a good source of zinc. I enjoy organic maple syrup on my oatmeal and in my smoothies to sweeten them a bit. If you are going to replace granulated sugar with organic maple syrup, replace each cup of sugar with $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of syrup, depending on how sweet you would like the recipe.

Black Strap Molasses

Blackstrap molasses is the dark liquid byproduct of the process of refining sugar cane into table sugar. It contains iron, which is great for energy, and is also an excellent source of copper, manganese, potassium, and magnesium. It is great in baked beans and gives cookies and cakes a distinctive flavour. I also recommend purchasing only un sulphured organic black strap molasses.

Stevia

Stevia is derived from a plant called stevia, which grows in Paraguay and Brazil and has been used for centuries in South America. It is 30 times sweeter than sugar and has no caloric intake and it does not affect the blood sugar levels.

Panela

Panela is evaporated cane juice obtained through boiling and because it is unrefined, like regular sugar, it contains significant amounts of vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, and iron - more than most commonly eaten foods. Traditional cultures in Central and South America use it to prevent tooth decay, anemia (iron deficiency) and rickets (vitamin C deficiency). It also provides energy without the "sugar rush" and blood sugar spikes that are the result of refined sugars.

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