



SWEETENERS

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Complex carbohydrates:

Vital to digestion, metabolism and oxidation of protein and fat. Complex carbohydrates often supply energy and other nutrients that the body needs, such as fiber. Examples: whole grain cereals and breads, beans and potatoes.

Simple carbohydrates:

Also known as simple sugars, quick energy sources that offer little to no nutritional value. They are classified as simple because they contain only one or two molecules of sugar. The major simple carbohydrates are glucose, maltose, fructose, and sucrose and are found both in natural and processed foods. Natural foods containing simple sugars include fruits, vegetables and milk products.

Fructose: Naturally occurs in many fruits, vegetables and honey.

Glucose: The main type of sugar in the blood and the major source of energy for the body's cells. It comes from the foods we eat, and the body can make it from other substances.

Sucrose: A disaccharide consisting of fructose and glucose, found naturally in plants. Table sugar is sucrose, typically extracted from sugar cane, but it can also come from sugar beets.

Glycemic index: Provides a measure of how quickly blood sugar levels rise after eating a particular type of food. After eating, the time it takes for the body to convert carbohydrates and release glucose into the bloodstream varies, depending on the type of carbohydrate and the food that's consumed. Some carbohydrate containing foods cause blood glucose levels to rise rapidly; others have a more gradual effect.

WHAT IS SUGAR?

Sugar comes in many different forms. Naturally occurring sugars can be found in fruits and vegetables, whole grains and starches. These complex carbohydrates offer the body balanced energy because they take longer to digest and have a gentler effect on blood sugar levels than some refined sugars do. Foods with added sugar, however, can cause a dramatic rise in blood sugar levels and tend to be higher in calories and lower in vitamins and minerals. Our bodies need sugar for energy and as fuel for the brain, but any excess of sugar is unhealthy, and some sweeteners can be better for your health than others.

The Co-op carries a wide selection of sweeteners both in the Bulk Department and in the baking section of the Grocery Department.

DERIVED FROM SUGAR CANE

White cane sugar, aka table sugar, has been bleached and heavily processed, losing the nutrients found in the original sugar cane. Other cane derivatives retain some of the plant's vitamins and minerals, including: potassium, calcium, magnesium, zinc, and vitamins A and C and the B vitamins. The most nutrients are found where the molasses has not been removed.

Cane Sugar, unbleached

Evaporated sugarcane juice that has been mechanically processed and refined but not chemically bleached.

Erythritol

(Wholesome Sweeteners "Zero")

Produced from naturally fermented and crystallized organic sugarcane juice; zero calories and a zero glycemic index; may help prevent tooth decay.

Molasses

Thick, dark syrup remaining from the process of refining sugar cane into table sugar. The color and flavor depend on whether the syrup is derived from an early or later extraction. "Blackstrap" results from the third boiling and extraction; it is a good source of iron, vitamin B6, potassium, calcium and magnesium.

Brown Sugar

White cane sugar combined with molasses. The molasses adds some calcium, phosphorous, iron, potassium and sodium.

Unrefined Whole Cane Sugar

(also known as Sucanat and Rapadura)

The juice from sugar cane that has been dehydrated and granulated, without the molasses being removed. The large brown granules have a rich flavor, with the original cane's nutrients intact.

Turbinado

Also called raw sugar or demerara, it is not technically raw, but less refined than white sugar. Cane juice is extracted from the cane and spun in a turbine. The large crystals are light brown with a slight molasses flavor, although most of the molasses has been removed.

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CANE SUGAR ALTERNATIVES:

Agave Nectar

Amber-colored liquid derived from the starchy root/bulb of the blue agave plant and converted into a syrup through a chemical process. Composed primarily of fructose and much sweeter than table sugar.

Barley Malt Syrup

Whole-grain sweetener made from sprouted or hot air-dried barley with a malty flavor. High in complex carbohydrates, so it has a gentle effect on blood sugar levels.

Brown Rice Syrup

Made from cooked brown rice and sprouted barley, with a mild, subtle flavor. High in complex carbohydrates, so it has a gentle effect on blood sugar levels.

Coconut Sugar

Also known as coconut palm sugar, coconut crystals, and coconut nectar; made from sap of the coconut palm that has been extracted then boiled and dehydrated. Similar in flavor to brown sugar and can be substituted for cane sugar in most recipes. Contains iron, zinc, calcium, potassium, vitamin C, B vitamins and some amino acids. Low glycemic index.

Corn Syrup

Originally made by pressing juice out of corn stalks and then boiling down to a sweet syrup. Today commercial corn syrup is made from chemically purified cornstarch mixed with water and either hydrochloric or sulfuric acid, then steamed to create a highly refined glucose. Added to almost all commercial candies and baked goods to sweeten, thicken or add body to foods, to prevent crystallization and to retain moisture.

Date Sugar

Made solely from pitted, dehydrated and pulverized dates; not technically considered a sugar since the whole fruit is used. It has a mild date flavor and is as sweet as table sugar. In baking the granules do not dissolve when added to liquids.

Honey

Contains minerals, enzymes, amino acids and polyphenols. Refined by bees, honey is 20-60% sweeter than white sugar, with anti-inflammatory, anti-tumor and anti-bacterial properties. Raw honey retains the phytonutrients that can be lost in processing, and darker honey contains more minerals. Low glycemic index.

Maple Syrup & Maple Sugar

The concentrated sap of sugar maple trees. It takes 30-40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup; maple sugar has been boiled down further until it crystallizes. It is high in sucrose with small amounts of trace minerals. Grade A and B have nothing to do with quality; A is generally lighter and mellow, and B is darker with a heartier flavor. Choose organically grown brands to avoid chemical additives.

Palm Sugar

Made from the sap of the sugar, coconut, date or toddy palm tree. The liquid is boiled down to make palm sugar. Not highly refined, it retains most of its mineral content.

Sorghum

Concentrated juice of the millet-like sorghum plant, with a lighter and fruitier flavor than molasses.

Stevia Extract

Non-caloric herbal sweetener made from the stevia leaf. Because it doesn't affect blood glucose levels, research indicates that it may be used by both diabetics and hypoglycemics. Mild molasses and licorice flavors; tends to have a bitter aftertaste.

Xylitol

Made from birch bark and fibrous fruits and vegetables; low-calorie with low-glycemic index; may help prevent tooth decay; large amounts may cause mild gastrointestinal discomfort.

HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP (HFCS)

HFCS is a man-made sweetener extracted from corn stalks and manipulated to transform some of the corn's glucose into fructose. It is almost ubiquitous in processed foods—from sodas and cereals to crackers and salad dressings. Many experts are linking it to the dramatic rise in obesity rates and examining the relationship between its consumption and numerous adverse medical conditions. The best way to avoid the potential dangers of excess dietary fructose is to avoid foods with added HFCS. Read labels carefully. It is the Co-op's policy not to carry any products containing HFCS.

Sources:

Whole Foods Companion – Dianne Onstad

Healing with Whole Foods – Paul Pitchford

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