

Time for a post-holiday reset?

Raise your hand if you have overindulged in the sugar department lately. With the holidays behind us, many people are feeling that “new year” motivation to set goals and focus on their health again. Too many times, our resolutions start off great but then end up being too unrealistic to sustain. Or maybe we just didn’t have a good plan, the necessary tools, or the right motivation to be successful.

Personally, I’m not a fan of New Year’s resolutions just for this reason. But I am a fan of setting realistic goals that truly mean something to us and help us feel better and be healthier. I have set many goals through-out my life, but probably one of the best goals that changed my life the most was giving up added sugar. This wasn’t a diet or resolution for me, it was a lifestyle change that had a huge impact on my overall health.

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, about half of the added sugar being consumed comes from sugary drinks.¹ Just from drinks! But this is great because it gives many people a great starting point to begin to reduce their added sugar intake. It makes sense – from sodas, to juice, to flavored coffee drinks – many people are consuming 2-3 sugary drinks a day. Did you know that the average American adult is getting around 17 teaspoons of added sugar a day? The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends men get no more than 9 teaspoons and women no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugar a day – at the most!²

What’s the big deal, you might think? One of the problems is that added sugars have no essential nutrients but they still have calories. That means basically they aren’t providing anything good for your body, nothing to help it be nourished, to heal, and to grow – what some might call empty calories. In fact added sugars have been shown to cause inflammation and weight gain amongst other things.

The AHA states that too much added sugar is harmful and can put you at risk for many diseases such as cardiovascular disease, dementia and Alzheimer’s, colon cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and more.

What’s the good news? We can easily cut back on added sugar by decreasing sugary drinks, eating more fruit and vegetables to help us feel full and energized (fruit has the double benefit of being sweet) and most importantly starting to read the nutrition facts label and ingredient lists to be aware of how much added sugar is in the packaged items being consumed.

You might be surprised to see added sugar in some products like peanut butter, pasta sauce, and even beans. Often times there is a different brand that doesn’t have as much added sugar or any at all, so you can make simple swaps and be a smarter shopper to help reduce the amount of added sugar being consumed.

To find how much added sugar is in a packaged item look at the nutrition facts label and find where carbohydrates are listed. Under this section you will now see that added sugars is listed. But how much is considered high? Look to the right where it shows the percent Daily Value (DV). A product considered low in added sugar would have a DV of 5 percent. A product considered high would have a DV of 20 percent or more.³

You can also start by decreasing the amount of the food or drink item being consumed – for instance start by choosing a smaller size drink or if adding sugar to a drink just add half the amount. Then once you feel like you are ready to make more changes you can start to work toward that new goal.

Lastly, trying to look at making changes that aren't just for a certain period of time but are really lifestyle changes helps us to not feel deprived or overwhelmed but to understand change is a process and the end goal is worth it – our improved health and wellbeing.

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https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/DGA_Cut-Down-On-Added-Sugars.pdf

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/sugar/how-too-much-added-sugar-affects-your-health-infographic>

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/added-sugar-in-the-diet/#:~:text=The%20DV%20can%20be%20an,per%20serving%20is%20considered%20high>