

BEST WAYS TO HANDLE SUGAR FOR YOUNG SWIMMERS

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Sugar, the sweet stuff added to foods in baking and other food processing techniques, is something young swimmers should have a handle on. After all, sugar (or sucrose) is a carb, but it doesn't have a lot of nutritional power, nor does it offer the long-lasting energy found in complex carbs, like bread, beans, and fruits and veggies.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), American youth are eating too much added sugar. In a 2012 study looking at the consumption of added sugar in youth from 2005 to 2008, researchers found the following:

- Overall, intake of added sugar was down, slightly, from previous years
- Boys ate more added sugar than girls
- Much of the added sugar was from food sources, rather than beverage items
- Most of the high-sugar foods were consumed in the home

When it comes to the calorie dent from added sugars, here's the low down:

6-11 year olds: males consumed an average of 345 calories from added sugar per day; females consumed 293 calories from added sugar per day.

12-18 year olds: males consumed an average of 442 calories from added sugar per day; females consumed an average of 314 calories per day from added sugar.

That's a lot of calories from sugar! The recommendations from the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) are 5-15% of total calories eaten each day from what they call discretionary calories, or foods with added sugar and solid fats.

Where can I find added sugars?

You can find added sugar in many foods. Added sugar is used as an ingredient in foods like desserts, soft drinks, ice cream, candy, chocolate and jelly. Sugar can be eaten separately, as in the case of sugary candy or syrup, or can be added to foods in processing or baking, like in cookies.

The following foods are considered added sugars: white sugar, brown sugar, raw sugar, honey, syrup, molasses, corn syrup, corn syrup solids, high fructose corn syrup, fructose sweetener, dextrin, and more.

Added sugar can be found in beverages such as soda, fruit drinks or cocktails, ades, sports drinks, flavored milk, sweetened bottled water, bottled smoothies, energy drinks, and fruit nectars.

Food with added sugar include breakfast cereal, flavored and fruited yogurt, dairy-based desserts (chocolate, ice cream), grain-based desserts (cookies, cakes, pies), and candy.

How much should swimmers eat?

I advise shooting for no more than 10% of the total caloric intake coming from added sugar food sources, which is in line with the World Health Organization (WHO). This ends up being about 150-250 calories per day, depending on age, with the higher calorie level appropriate for older teens.

If added sugar is a problem for the swimmer, here are four ways to cut back:

1. Allow no more than one to two sweet foods or beverages per day as long as the swimmer is healthy, growing and physically active on most days. If the swimmer is overweight, set an average limit for one sweet food or beverage per day. Restricting all sweet foods and beverages can backfire, as research shows that strict elimination can feel like deprivation to children, driving them to want the absent food more, and even seeking it out. It's best to have moderate exposure to sweets with limits in place so swimmers know how to live with them.
2. Nix the soda and other sugary beverages. Athletes don't need these in their diet, and they don't offer much nutrition anyway. Keep a cap on sports drinks and only allow them during exercise or competition. If your swimmer has a soda or an extra sports drink (outside of practice or competition), count it as a sweet.

3. Be selective about sweets. Choose sweet food or beverages that contribute nutrition, such as ice cream as a source of calcium, or oatmeal raisin cookies as a source of fiber. If juice is included in the swimmer's diet, make sure it is 100% juice and limit the daily amount to 8-12 ounces.

4. Purchase lower-sugar items. When shopping for cereal, granola bars or yogurt, look for brands that have around 6 grams of added sugar per serving or less. Hint: these won't be the sugary cereal brands. Another way to manage sugar content is to look at the ingredient label. Sugar ingredients should be at the end of the list, not the beginning.

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