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## It's a Sweet Life

Our bodies need one type of sugar, called glucose, to survive. Glucose is the number one food for the brain, and it is an extremely important source of fuel throughout the body. However, there is no need to add glucose to a diet because your body can make the glucose it needs by breaking down food molecules like carbohydrates, proteins, and fats.

Some foods naturally contain sugars, such as fruits, vegetables, and milk. These are the good ways to get sugar. When you eat an orange, for example, you are getting a lot of nutrients and dietary fiber along with natural sugars.

Did you know that beverages like soda, energy drinks, specialty coffee drinks and sports drinks are the leading source of added sugars in the American diet? Juices naturally contain a lot of sugar, but some versions add even more to make them taste sweeter.

A word of caution to individuals who drink Boost or Ensure: The labels promote them as nutritional drinks that have benefits of vitamins and protein, but they both contain more grams of sugar per serving than one serving of a sugary cereal! Another drawback to these drinks is the very low fiber content, and roughage is even more crucial as we age. Do not depend on these drinks or others for your total calcium intake even though a label shows that it provides 100% of your daily value. Your body can only absorb half of that amount at one time.

About 15% of calories in the American adult diet come from added sugars. That is about 22 teaspoons of added sugar a day! Experts agree that Americans eat and drink way too much sugar, and it's contributing to the obesity epidemic. Sugars definitely make foods and drinks taste better, but then those foods and drinks can be high in calories and offer none of the healthful benefits of fruits and other naturally sweet foods.

Added sugars can be hard to identify. On a list of ingredients, they may be listed as sucrose (table sugar), corn sweetener, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit-juice concentrates, nectars, raw sugar, malt syrup, maple syrup, fructose sweeteners, liquid fructose, honey, molasses, anhydrous dextrose, or other words ending in “-ose,” the chemical suffix for sugars. If any of these words are among the first few ingredients on a food label, that food is likely high in sugar. The total amount of sugar in a food appears under “Total Carbohydrates” on the Nutrition Facts label.

Brenda Aufdenkamp, UNL Extension Educator, suggests finding alternatives to sugars and some great food tips at: [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu).