

## SUGAR SNEAKS INTO A BUSY MAN'S DIET

**Simon Warner** 30, *music business professional*  
Simon works in central London. Although he likes to keep fit, and he and his housemate try to cook healthily, his busy lifestyle means eating out or resorting to ready meals once or twice a week.

'I don't really think about sugar in my food. I suppose I only look out for things that get highlighted as a serious risk. I'd rather not eat a high level of sugar but it's not what I look for on packages,' he says.

We asked Simon to carry out his normal weekly shop and share the secrets of his basket with us. He chose fresh produce including meat, fruit and vegetables, as well as a few treats like biscuits and chocolate yogurts.

He also bought a couple of easy-to-cook meals – a deep-pan pizza, which contains 16.6g of sugar, a ready meal for one containing 13.5g, and several tins of beans with 20.8g of sugar each. Some of these sugars will be natural and come from fruit or vegetables, of course.

Simon says: 'I wouldn't have even thought about looking at the sugar content of a pizza. I'd have guessed that beans might be quite high, but I was surprised that my Thai green curry had sugar in it.'



# Sweet little mystery

## SWEET SECRETS

Sugar comes in many guises. Look out for these ingredients on labels, which are likely to indicate added sugars. While all these types contain a similar number of calories per gram, they vary in levels of sweetness.

■ **Fructose** Also look for fruit sugar and levulose

■ **Glucose** Also look for corn sugar and dextrose

■ **Glucose syrup** Also look for corn syrup

■ **High-fructose glucose syrup** Also look for high-fructose corn syrup, fructose-glucose syrup, glucose-fructose syrup and isoglucose

■ **Honey**

■ **Invert sugar**

■ **Invert sugar syrup** Also look for sugar syrup

■ **Lactose** Also look for milk sugar

■ **Maltose**

■ **Molasses**

■ **Sucrose** Also look for beet sugar, brown sugar, cane sugar, granulated sugar, icing sugar and sugar

■ **Sucrose syrup**

With debates over how much sugar we should eat each day and the many types, which can be hidden on labels, it's no wonder you're confused. We sift through to give you the facts

It should come as no surprise when tucking into your Best Buy Easter egg (see March, p26) that you're consuming a lot of sugar. But you might be shocked to discover that your evening main course could contain more sugar gram for gram than your dessert.

When Which? scoured supermarket shelves and investigated the shopping baskets of a family and a busy single professional (see boxes opposite and above), we found that savoury foods as well as treats were often high in sugar.

On our shopping trip we found that meals such as Asda sticky chilli chicken and Tesco crispy beef with sweet chilli sauce contain more sugar gram for gram than vanilla ice cream.

Sugar is used as a preservative as well as a sweetener, but in these meals there is more than three times the amount per

**'I wouldn't have thought to look at the sugar content of a pizza'**



portion that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) says is high.

### Sugar sources

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate and provides fuel for the body, but eating too much can be bad for you.

Added sugars, known as non-milk extrinsic sugars (NMES), are more harmful to teeth and lack other useful nutrients. They can be found in cakes, biscuits, fizzy drinks, soups, cereals, tinned foods, pizzas and pasta sauces, for example.

Sugars that occur naturally in foods like milk, fruit, vegetables and grains are locked into the structure and tend to be less harmful to teeth. Watch out for honey, though, which contains NMES. Checking levels and types of sugar can be difficult, however. Nutritional labelling is voluntary, unless you make claims such as 'low sugar'. Sugars aren't always listed separately from carbohydrates. On our shopping trip, we found that Alpen raspberry

## TO SWEETEN OR NOT

Low-sugar or sugar-free alternatives of many foods and drinks are available – these will often contain an artificial sweetener such as saccharin, aspartame or acesulfame-k. There has been concern about the safety of both saccharin and aspartame. Studies in the 1980s found saccharin could cause bladder cancer in rats and it was banned in Canada, but the World Health Organisation now accepts that, based on data currently available, the effects shown in rats were not relevant to humans. More recently, an Italian study linked aspartame with some cancers in rats. The European Food Safety Authority evaluated the study and concluded that, on the basis of data currently available, aspartame is fit for human consumption.



**'I thought honey was generally considered better for you'**

with yogurt bars contain 73.5g of carbohydrate per 100g, but there are no details of specific sugar content.

Labels list ingredients in descending order of weight, but different types of sugar are listed separately and can add up. On the Alpen bar label, glucose syrup is listed fourth, and sugar, milk lactose and dextrose are all lower down. Also, remember that fruits and milk, for example, will be listed but not always the natural sugar they contain.

You'll find some low-fat products are high in sugar. We found Snack-a-Jacks classic caramel rice and corn snacks, which have less than 5 per cent fat but 28g of sugar per 100g. Weight Watchers oat digestive biscuits are lower in saturated fat than McVitie's digestives, but they contain 20.5g of sugar per 100g – almost 4 per cent more than the McVitie's.



Meanwhile, for sugar, the FSA's traffic-light scheme says:

■ **HIGH** Food: more than 15g per 100g or more than 18g if the portion is more than 100g. Drink: more than 7.5g per 100ml.

■ **MEDIUM** Food: more than 5g and up to 15g per 100g. Drink: up to 7.5g per 100ml.

■ **LOW** Food: 5g per 100g or less. Drink: 2.5g per 100ml or less.

Avoiding added sugar may be difficult, but scrutinising labels and swapping snack bars that are high in added sugar for fruit will help you and your family have a healthier diet.

And look out next month for our in-depth guide to traffic-light labelling, which will explain how you can shop more easily for a balanced diet.

## How many spoonfuls?

The government does not yet recommend the amount of total sugars you should consume each day, but we support the FSA's multiple traffic-light labelling scheme. This shows what it considers are high, medium and low amounts of sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt in individual products, on the front of packs. It focuses on processed foods or those made of several ingredients, such as sandwiches, ready meals, processed meats, pizzas and cereals.

The FSA has asked the government advisory body, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, to review sugar in our diets, so guidance on maximum daily amounts should be on its way.



## SPOT THE SUGAR IN YOUR POTS OF YOGURT

**Kellie and Luke Williams** 30 and 29, administration assistant and accounts manager

The Williams' weekly shop contains lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, pasta, meat and fish as well as some tinned, packet and frozen foods.

Kellie chooses most of the family's groceries. She's diet conscious and tries to give healthy foods to her daughter Nyema, who is three.

'I always look at labels – but generally only calories and fat, particularly saturated fats, because I know how much you should eat and I can easily translate this to my family's diet. But I never look at sugar because it's confusing and I don't fully understand what sugars are good or bad,' she says.

'Nyema has a sweet tooth but I avoid giving her sweets except for the occasional treat. I prefer to give her healthier snacks with fruit as an alternative.'

When we scoured the family's shopping basket, we noticed Kellie had chosen Organix Goodies biscuits and Organix cereal bars for Nyema. They don't contain added sugar but the biscuits have 20g per 100g of sugar from fruit and the cereal bars have 29.7g per 100g. Her Petits Filous Plus drinks and Petits Filous yogurts have natural and added sugar. The drinks contain 13.1g of total sugars per 100g and the yogurts have 12.3g per 100g. Kellie says: 'In future I'll look at labels to choose lower sugar options for Nyema.'

Luke has Kellogg's crunchy nut cornflakes, which contain 35g of sugar per 100g, including brown sugar, sugar, honey and glucose fructose syrup. He tells us: 'It's important to eat breakfast before I go to work so I'm not tempted by a bacon sandwich mid-morning. When I taste the sweetness I think of it as honey, which I thought was generally considered better for you than sugar. I hadn't realised that wasn't the case.'