

CHINA

Making  
sense of  
***sugar***

FACTS ABOUT SUGAR

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# WHAT IS SUGAR?

Sugar is a natural ingredient which provides sweetness to a range of foods and drinks, including fruits and vegetables, fruit juices, jams, soft drinks, desserts and dairy products.

The most common sugars found in foods and drinks are:

**Glucose and fructose** – found in fruits, vegetables and honey.

**Sucrose** – commonly thought of as table sugar when referring to 'sugar'. It is composed of glucose and fructose and is extracted from sugar cane (grown in tropical and sub-tropical parts of the world, including Malawi) or sugar beet (grown in more temperate parts of the world, including Europe). Sucrose is also naturally present in most fruits and vegetables.

**Lactose** – commonly known as milk sugar because it is found in milk and dairy products.

**Maltose** – commonly known as malt sugar because it is found in malted drinks and beer.

Different sugars have different properties (structure, texture, flavour, sweetness and preservative) but the property of each sugar is the same, whether they are naturally present in food and drink or used during preparation.

The body does not distinguish between sugars used in manufacturing or in the home, and those found naturally in fruits and vegetables. For example, sucrose in an apple is broken down in exactly the same way as the sucrose (sugar) in your sugar bowl. However, the rate of which the sucrose is absorbed can vary depending on if the source is a solid or liquid food, for example in an apple or apple juice.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The body breaks down sugars and starches into glucose. Sugars are an important source of energy with glucose being the most important for the body. Our brain requires around **130g of glucose** per day to keep functioning.

# WHAT IS THE ROLE THAT SUGARS CAN PLAY IN A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET?

Sugars are an important source of energy with glucose being the most important for the body. Carbohydrates comprising sugars and starches are broken down in the body into glucose. Our brain requires around 130g of glucose per day to keep functioning.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Sugar and sugars have **four calories per gram**, which compares to protein (four calories), alcohol (seven calories) and fat (nine calories).

The World Health Organization<sup>1</sup> advises that eating a variety of foods and consuming less salt, sugars and saturated and industrially-produced trans-fats, are essential for a healthy diet. It also

sets out that a healthy diet consists of a combination of different foods including:

- Staples like cereals (wheat, barley, rye, maize or rice) or starchy tubers or roots (potato, yam, taro or cassava)
- Legumes (lentils and beans)
- Fruit and vegetables
- Foods from animal sources (meat, fish, eggs and milk)

The World Health Organization<sup>2</sup> also recommends that adults and children reduce their daily intake of free sugars\* to less than 10% of their total energy intake. It advises that a further reduction to below 5% or roughly 25 grams (6 teaspoons) per day would provide additional health benefits.

\*Free sugars are all sugars added to foods or drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, as well as sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates.



# EATING A BALANCED DIET: FOOD GROUPS

In 2016, the Chinese Nutrition Society developed a set of dietary guidelines<sup>3</sup> which provide information to help people achieve a balanced diet. The guidelines set out six recommendations to achieve a balanced diet:

1. Eat a variety of foods; have a diet that is cereal-based
2. Be physically active to maintain a healthy body weight
3. Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, and soy and dairy products

4. Consume fish, poultry, eggs and lean meat in moderate amounts
5. Limit intake of salt, oil, sugar and alcohol
6. Develop healthy eating habits and eliminate food waste

## The Dietary Food Guide Pagoda

In China, there is the Food Guide Pagoda<sup>4</sup> which aims to provide dietary guidance to people. It includes five levels, representing the recommended proportion of the different food groups in the diet, together with a recommendation to drink plenty of water and to do physical activity.

## EATING A BALANCED DIET: FOOD GROUPS



### Recommended intake (g)

Salt	<6g
Cooking oil	25–30g
Milk and dairy products	300g
Soybeans and nuts	25–35g
Lean meats	40–75g
Fish	40–75g
Eggs	40–50g
Vegetables	300–500g
Fruits	200–350g
Cereals, tubers and legumes	250–400g
Whole grains and legumes	50–150g
Tubers	50–100g
Water	1500–1700ml

Engage in physical activities  
equivalent to 6000 walking steps daily

# HOW ARE SUGARS LABELLED?

The sugars most commonly present in foods and drinks are glucose, fructose, lactose and maltose – collectively they are known as sugars and this term is used in nutritional labelling: ‘carbohydrates – of which total sugars.’

Today all pre-packaged foods and drinks sold in China must meet the rules set out in the National Standard 28050-2011<sup>5</sup>.

## Nutrient label

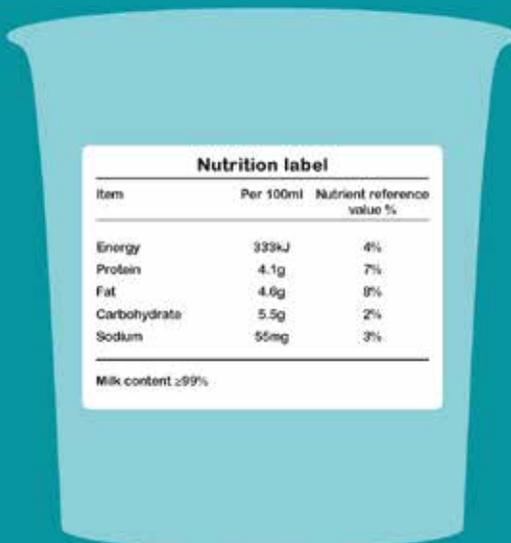
Currently all pre-packaged foods and drinks in China must include a nutrition label which can help you understand the nutrient and calorie count of the products you are buying including the amount of sugars. This label can be found

typically on the back or side of pack and will list the major nutrients in a product (per 100g/100ml), including energy and the amounts of fat, carbohydrates, sugars, protein and sodium. Some products also show the nutrient content in terms of per portion as a percentage of the nutrient reference value.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The first place you’ll be able to find out whether a product contains sugars is in the ingredients list. All the ingredients that have been used to make the product will be shown in order of weight.

## NUTRIENT LABEL



Nutrition label		
Item	Per 100ml	Nutrient reference value %
Energy	333kJ	4%
Protein	4.1g	7%
Fat	4.6g	8%
Carbohydrate	5.5g	2%
Sodium	55mg	3%

Milk content ≥99%

# SUGAR MYTHS

There are many myths about sugar and sugars, but how do you separate fact from fiction? Here are some of the most common myths to help.

## **MYTH** Sugar has no role in the diet

Sugars are an important source of energy with glucose being the most important for the body. For example, our brain requires around 130 grams of glucose per day to keep functioning. You can find glucose in all sorts of foods including fruit, vegetables and honey.

## **MYTH** Sugar has more calories than other ingredients

Calories are essentially a measure of the amount of energy in food and drinks.

When we eat or drink, we are putting energy (or calories) into our body. Different food and drinks provide different amounts of energy. This information can typically be found on food and drink labels, as well as within nutritional information panels.

Sugar and sugars have four calories per gram, which compares to protein (four calories), alcohol (seven calories) and fat (nine calories).

## **MYTH** Sugar is an 'empty' calorie

'Empty calories' is a concept often used to refer to food and drinks that supply energy without other nutrients. However, since calories themselves provide your body with energy there is no such thing as an 'empty calorie' – a calorie is a calorie.

## **MYTH** Some sugars are better for you than others

The body breaks down sugar (sucrose) in exactly the same way independently of their source. However, the rate of which the sucrose is absorbed can vary depending on if the source is a solid or liquid food, for example in an apple or apple juice.

## **MYTH** Sugars are hidden in food and drinks

When looking at labels, sugars most commonly present in food and drinks are glucose, fructose, sucrose, lactose and maltose – collectively they are known as 'sugars' and this term is typically used in nutritional labelling on pack: 'carbohydrate – of which sugars'.

Food labels in most countries do not currently identify 'added sugars' (i.e. sugars that have been added during food and drink manufacturing). It is not possible to distinguish naturally occurring sugars from added sugars in a laboratory, given they are the same molecules.

However, some countries are now moving towards 'added sugars' labelling. For example, the US is introducing 'added sugars' onto labels of pre-packaged food and drink products in 2020. 'Added sugars' on US labels will include sugars that are added during the processing of foods, as well as sugars from added syrups, honey and concentrated fruit or vegetable juices.

Today all pre-packaged foods and drinks sold

in China must meet the rules set out in the National Standard 28050-2011<sup>5</sup>.

### **MYTH** Sugar causes obesity and diabetes

Current scientific evidence does not suggest that sugar directly causes conditions such as obesity or diabetes. Both of these conditions are due to a complex range of factors such as being overweight, leading a sedentary lifestyle and in some cases genetics<sup>6</sup>.

However, like protein, starch, fat and alcohol, sugar is a source of calories in the diet and if we consistently consume more 'energy' or calories than our bodies use, this can lead to an accumulation of excess body fat. This can then result in obesity which can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes.

To find out more about consuming the right amount of food for your energy needs and the right balance of foods, check out China's Food Guide Pagoda<sup>4</sup> which aims to provide dietary guidance to people. It includes five levels, representing the recommended proportion of the different food groups in the diet, together with a recommendation to drink plenty of water and to do physical activity.

NOTE: Scientific evidence contained within a report published by the UK's Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)<sup>7</sup> found no direct link between total sugars intake and diabetes. However, it suggests a greater risk is associated with a higher intake of sugars-sweetened beverages.

### **MYTH** Sugars rot your teeth

All foods or drinks that contain fermentable carbohydrates (e.g. sugary foods such as cookies, cakes, soft drinks and candy as well

as less obvious foods, such as bread, crackers, bananas and breakfast cereals), can increase the risk of tooth decay.

Fermentable carbohydrates including sugars are broken down by the bacteria in your mouth to produce acid and this acid can then dissolve away some of the enamel surface of your teeth. Brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day and keeping sugary food and drinks for mealtimes, rather than as a snack, is the best way to protect them. It's important to remember that it is both the frequency of consumption and the amount that can have an impact on tooth decay.

NOTE: The World Dental Federation (DFI) suggest that the risk of dental caries increases if consuming excessive amounts of sugar from snacks, processed food and soft drinks, for example more than four times a day and/or more than 50 grams (approx. 12 teaspoons) per day. They also recommend awareness of not only sugars added to food but also those naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates.<sup>8</sup>

### **MYTH** Sugar is addictive

Current scientific evidence does not support the idea that sugar (or any other foodstuff) can be addictive<sup>9</sup>. Certain food and drinks of course can be pleasurable to consume, but it's important not to confuse this with clinical addiction.

# ABOUT MAKING SENSE OF SUGAR

**Making Sense of Sugar is a campaign that aims to inform and educate people about sugar and the role it can play in the diet in order that people can make informed choices about what they consume.**

Based on robust science and facts, the campaign provides information about sugar in a way which is simple, straightforward and informative, as well as addressing common myths.

The [www.makingsenseofsugar.cn](http://www.makingsenseofsugar.cn) website includes information on the different types of sugars, as well as simple guidance on identifying sugars on food and drink labels and tips on healthy eating and staying active.

AB Sugar China is one of China's leading sugar producers and is part of the wider AB Sugar Group that is owned by Associated British Foods (ABF) plc. AB Sugar has a controlling interest with other ABF divisions.

Making Sense of Sugar has been developed and funded by AB Sugar which is one of the largest sugar producers in the world, with operations in 10 countries and around 32,000 employees, including those employed by AB Sugar China.

**For more information on Making Sense of Sugar visit [www.makingsenseofsugar.cn](http://www.makingsenseofsugar.cn)**

**For more information on AB Sugar China, visit: [www.absugar.com](http://www.absugar.com)**



# REFERENCES

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## **Eating a balanced diet: food groups**

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<http://dg.cnsoc.org/index.html>

## **How are sugars labelled?**

5. Healthy China Action Promotion Committee

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9. NeuroFAST (2013):  
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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