

Go Easy on Your Sweets **by the American Institute for Cancer Research**

Chocolate, bakery goods, soft drinks and other sweets are available around the clock. Their constant accessibility can make eating moderate amounts difficult. Although complete avoidance of sweets is unnecessary for good health, the calories in sweets add up quickly, making weight control more difficult. Sweets can also replace nutritious foods that have vitamins, fiber, phytochemicals and other substances vital to our well-being.

Hold the Sugar, Honey Pie

Part of the problem with sweets is that setting reasonable limits can be confusing. Some experts suggest that no more than ten percent of our calories should come from added sugars. Added sugars means sweeteners like table sugar, high fructose corn syrup and honey, not the natural sugars in fruits and milk, for example.

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According to these experts, a reasonable amount of added sugars would vary with a person's calorie needs. Adults who are sedentary or trying to lose weight might limit themselves to a 12-ounce regular soft drink or two cookies and a cup of ice cream, as long as few other sweetened foods, like jelly or sugary cereals are eaten during the day. Moderately active people, who want to maintain their weight, could enjoy a small candy bar and six small cookies per day.

A Sweet Choice You Can Love

Coming up with a personal goal for eating sweets in moderation is only part of the problem. The bigger challenge is sticking with it. This necessarily involves making choices.

One way to reduce the tempting power of sweets is to limit the variety around you. If ice cream or cookies are your weakness, stock your home with only one flavor at a time. If you're eating out, avoid multi-dessert buffets where you're tempted to sample many kinds of desserts.

Identify the sweets you enjoy most in life and stick to small amounts of them. Some people find that eating sweets only for dessert - never as snacks - makes it easier to limit them and decrease cravings. One study found that after two weeks of eating chocolate twice a day, 15 to 30 minutes after a meal, people who craved chocolate felt their desire for chocolate drop. But cravers and non-cravers who ate chocolate between meals felt their desire increase. Regularly eating chocolate or other sweets to satisfy hunger between meals may teach us to crave it.

Likewise, eating behavior experts say that using sweets to cope with disturbing emotions encourages us to depend on them. For this reason, it is best to learn how to manage stress without turning to food.

It is a pleasure to eat sweets, but in order to reduce excess calorie intake, we need to choose those that give us the most pleasure and eat them in moderation. Doing so will make room for nutritious foods that build good health: vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans.

For more suggestions about healthy snacking, call the American Institute for Cancer Research at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 111, and ask for your free copy of Snacks - Homemade for Health.