

FACTSHEET No. 23

SUGAR AND BREAD

Background

Sugars are simple carbohydrates which occur naturally in fruit, vegetables, milk and honey.

There are a number of different sugars:

- Simple sugars such as glucose, dextrose and fructose are often found in fruit and vegetables
- Milk sugar is known as lactose
- Maltose (malt sugar) is found in malted drinks and beer
- Sucrose comes from sugar cane or beet and is often referred to as 'table' or 'added' sugar. It also occurs naturally in some fruit and vegetables.

Sugar in the Diet

Sugar provides energy for the body in the form of glucose. Some sugars are found naturally in foods e.g. fruits, vegetables, milk and wheat, while others are added during processing or preparation. Foods that naturally contain sugars typically provide other nutrients such as vitamins, minerals or fibre which are an important part of a healthy diet.

Sugar consumed in small quantities and as part of a healthy balanced diet does not pose any health risk.

As a guideline, an average adult should consume no more than 90g (18 teaspoons) of total sugars per day (combination of naturally occurring and added sugars). Current added sugar consumption in the UK exceeds the recommendations of not more than 11% of the total food energy or 55g (11 teaspoons) per day for a woman consuming 2000 kcal daily.

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) is a programme of surveys designed to assess the diet, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the general population and is jointly funded by the Department of Health (DH) in England and the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA). They have identified the key foods which are contributing to our sugar intakes. Plain commercial breads (white, wholemeal and seeded) do not feature as key contributors of sugars in the diet.

Data also shows that intakes of sugars have declined over the last decade in the UK, whilst rates of obesity and diabetes have been increasing.¹⁻⁴

Does Sliced Bread Contain Added Sugars? Contrary to a lot of media articles and stories, the vast majority of sliced white bread made in the UK has no added sugars. During the bread making process some of the starch in wheat flour is broken down into simple sugars, but this is used by the yeast during fermentation and very little remains in the finished bread. Most UK sliced and wrapped bread easily meets the definition for a low sugar food i.e. 5g sugar per 100g or less. It is green on front of pack colour coded nutritional information.

Why do we see a sugar figure in the nutrition information on the back of pack? This figure relates to the total amount of sugars present in the product – which can be a combination of naturally occurring and, where present, added sugars.

For products that contain '**no added sugars**' the sugars in the finished bread come from the sugars that are naturally present in flour and through the action of yeast during the fermentation process. Flour typically contains total sugar in the range 0.5 – 1.4g per 100g⁵,

What is the fermentation process? This is where the yeast breaks down the starch in the flour to produce sugars which it uses to produce carbon dioxide gas which then allows the dough to rise. The yeast breaks down more sugar than it actually uses so there will always be some sugar left over in the finished product.

Why do we add sugar? Sugar may be added in small amounts to help round out the more bitter notes in wholemeal and seeded breads for example.

Where added, sugars used will be clearly labelled in the ingredient list on pack and the nutrition table will show the total amount of sugars in the finished product. Any product with less than 5g sugars per 100g is considered low in sugar.

Please note that carbohydrate values in the nutrition table include the starch from the wheat/cereal grain as well as the total sugar value, which is also shown separately, as 'of which: sugars'.

References:

1. Department of Health (2011) *National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Headline results from Years 1 and 2 (combined) of the rolling programme 2008 – 2010*
2. Department of Health (2012) *National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Headline results from Years 1, 2 and 3 (combined) of the rolling programme 2008 – 2011*
3. NHS Information Centre for health and social care (2011) *Health Survey for England 2010 – Trend Tables.*
4. European Food Safety Authority (2010) *Scientific Opinion on dietary reference values for carbohydrates and dietary fibre.* The EFSA Journal 2010 8(3): 146
5. McCance & Widdowson Seventh Summary Edition.