



# Sugar:

## Not Empty Calories

There is no doubt that the centerpieces of a diet should be fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other fiber-rich and calcium-rich foods and that some foods or beverages should be consumed as treats.

However, the assertion that a food is less healthy just because it contains sugar is misleading and not science based. Numerous studies have confirmed that sugar makes many healthful foods palatable, which helps contribute to intakes of key vitamins and minerals necessary to maintain good health.

In its recent statement, the American Heart Association acknowledges the important role of sugars in the diet, saying, "In fact, when sugars are added to otherwise nutrient rich foods, such as sugar-sweetened dairy products like flavored milk and yogurt and sugar-sweetened cereals, the quality of children's and adolescents' diets improved, and in the case of flavored milks, no adverse effects on weight status were found."

The unintended negative consequences of severely restricting sugars in the diet are already apparent. In a recent study of a Connecticut school district where flavored milk was eliminated from school cafeterias, student milk consumption declined 63 percent. Milk is an important source of protein, calcium and vitamins A and D for children. Dietary guidance that fuels sugar hysteria has the real potential of undermining the public health goal of healthy diets, especially for children.

All-natural sugar/sucrose is a valuable ingredient worldwide. Sugar is used in food not only because it provides sweet taste, but sugar also provides essential functional properties required in food formulation.

### Sugars contributions to foods include:

- Taste
- Texture
- The Millard Reaction (browning)
- Preservative (lower water activity in preserves and baked goods)
- Product Stability
- Bulk
- Viscosity

Further, removing sugar from foods is based on the false assumption that sugars are an expendable ingredient in all foods and can be replaced by artificial sweeteners. Unless scientific evidence can validate the efficacy of advice that may lead to the replacement of natural ingredients with artificial, this potential change in our food supply could have the unintended consequences of impacting metabolism, satiety and could well lead to a preference for highly intense sweetness, especially with children.

Clearly, the important consideration for healthy eating is not the sugars content of a food but the nutrient contribution of the food and having a healthy overall diet that does not exceed your caloric needs. Simply avoiding certain ingredients in foods will not assure nutrient rich diets or reduce caloric intakes. This was the lesson learned from the low-fat decade in the 1990s.

Studies show that sugar is uniquely satiating. The old saw, "a little bit goes a long way" holds true for foods made with sugar.