

Sugar & a healthy body weight



About 39% of the world's adult population are overweight, with 13% obese. The fundamental cause of obesity and overweight is an energy imbalance between kilojoules consumed and kilojoules expended. An increased intake of energy dense foods and an increase in sedentary behaviours have been associated with this global epidemic. Energy balance is the key to preventing obesity and its associated illnesses – so how can you enjoy sugar and maintain a healthy weight?



Sugar and weight maintenance

Sugar is a common component in our diets and has been linked to obesity. Scientific studies have shown this is due to the energy that sugar provides in the diet, rather than something specific to sugar itself. Advice to limit intake of added sugars can therefore help to manage overall energy intake and in turn, body weight.

This fact is further supported by the observation that in New Zealand and Australia total sugar intake has declined in both males and females since the mid-nineties and apparent sugar consumption per capita has fallen by 26% between 1951 and 2011, whilst overweight and obesity rates continue to climb.

Why people gain weight

The behaviours around eating food are complex, involving biological, social, psychological and cultural factors. The increase in obesity can be partly attributed to our modern, affluent lifestyles which have enabled us to be less physically active and indulge in as much food and drink as we desire.

A consequence of this is that we can easily consume more energy than we expend in our daily activities, resulting in weight gain.

In short, the obesity trend is not a reflection of how much we consume of a particular ingredient, like sugar, but of how many kilojoules from food and drinks we consume overall, and whether we use up these kilojoules in our daily activities.

Definitions

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a commonly used measure for defining whether a person is a healthy weight or not. It is calculated by dividing your weight by the square of your height (kg/m²).

A BMI of:

- Less than 18.5 = underweight
- 18.5 to 24.99 = healthy weight
- 25 to 29.99 = overweight
- 30 or more = obese

NB: These BMI ranges are based on a Caucasian, adult population. The range may vary for different population and ethnic groups.

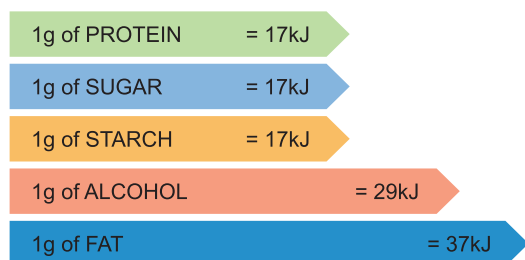


Analysis of the 2011-12 National Nutrition Study found that on average, over 35% of total daily energy was being consumed from discretionary or "junk" foods. It is recommended that in order to maintain a healthy weight, discretionary food consumption should be reduced.

What you can do to manage your weight

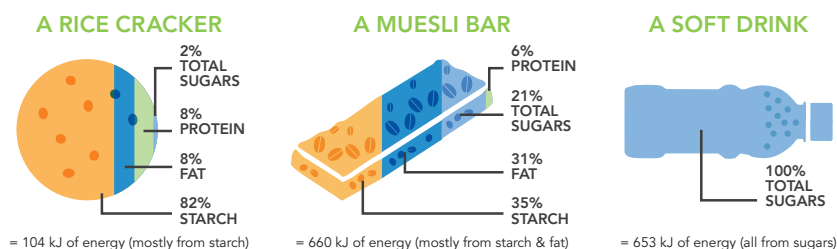
To achieve and maintain a healthy weight you need to eat a balanced diet and choose nutritious foods that meet your energy needs. Regular physical activity is another way of helping you keep your weight in check.

The energy in our food comes from either protein, carbohydrate (sugar and starch), fat or alcohol, or, a combination of these. It is good to understand how much energy (or kJ) these five nutrients release in the body as they are not the same. The diagram below shows protein and carbohydrates are 60% of the energy of alcohol and about half the energy of fat gram for gram.



It is also important to understand that the total amount of kilojoules contained in a food or drink will be the total amount of kilojoules produced by all the fat, protein, carbohydrates and alcohol combined in that food or beverage. So, foods which have more fat or alcohol in them will likely have higher kilojoule contents.

Knowing what is in food and where the energy is coming from can help you maintain a healthy weight. Some examples of the energy breakdown of a few common foods is provided below:



Finding out the total energy content of the foods and drinks you consume

The total energy contained in a food or drink is displayed in the Nutrition Information Panel of the food packaging as illustrated below. In this example, most of the 757 kilojoules (kJ) of energy comes from carbohydrates (starch). If you wanted to compare the kilojoule content of different products, then you would compare the amount of kilojoules per 100g or 100mL so you are comparing the same quantity of product.

NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL		
Typical Composition	A 50g serving provides	100g provides
Energy	757kJ 179kcal	1514kJ 358kcal
Protein	5.5g	11.0g
Carbohydrate	30.2g	60.4g
of which sugars	0.8g	1.5g
Fat	4.1g	8.1g
of which saturated	0.8g	1.6g
mono-unsaturated	1.9g	3.8g
polyunsaturated	1.4g	2.7g
Fibre	4.3g	8.5g
Sodium	trace	trace



THE SHORT AND SWEET OF IT

1. Obesity is a complex issue with many factors involved, including diet and sugars.
2. Energy imbalance remains key to managing body weight.
3. Sugar is a source of energy and produces about half the amount of kilojoules as fat, gram for gram – a gram of sugar produces 17 kilojoules while fat produces 37 kilojoules.
4. Advice to limit intake of added sugars can help to manage energy intake and therefore body weight.
5. By watching the kilojoule content of what you eat and drink, and by exercising regularly, you can enjoy sugar in moderation as part of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

For individual health advice see a qualified health professional.

Further Reading

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian health survey 2011–12 Canberra, 2012.
2. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Dietary Guidelines. Canberra, ACT, 2013
3. Ministry of Health. Eating and activity guidelines. <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/eating-and-activity-guidelines>
5. Barclay AW, Brand-miller J. The Australian paradox: a substantial decline in sugars intake over the same timeframe that overweight and obesity have increased. *Nutrients*. 2011; 3: 491–504.
6. NSW Government: Health. BMI calculator (Adult) [Internet]. NSW, Australia: Centre for Population Health; [cited Nov 2016]. Available from: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Pages/bmi.aspx>



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