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5 Best Natural Sugar Substitutes



Since I remember myself I had a sweet tooth. The sugar crash many people have, not only damages their teeth, but their health too. Sugar doesn't contain any vitamins or minerals and provides empty calories to our body, that may turn to fat if overly consumed. It may affect our cholesterol and triglycerides levels, and may lead to insulin resistance which can lead to obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Another point is that sugar, due to its powerful effects on the reward system in the brain, can lead to classic signs of addiction.

Some people may opt to use artificial sweeteners as sugar substitutes, however several studies have shown that they can have quite a lot of side effects, and the FDA has established an acceptable daily intake for each artificial sweetener.

In this article I would like to introduce you to natural sugar substitutes, that are healthier alternatives to sugar:

1. Stevia

Stevia is a plant whose leaves have a natural sweet taste and medicinal properties. It has no calories and it doesn't increase blood sugar levels or cause dental cavities. Stevia is available as a powder or concentrated liquid. Stevia prevents the growth of bacteria and other infectious organisms. It's also good as an antiseptic mouthwash, improves digestion, and helps strengthen the heart and vascular system.

When you buy stevia products look for a minimum of additives in the product, or just add a fresh leaves to a cup of tea. You can also make an extract by adding 1 cup of warm water to 1/4 cup fresh finely chopped stevia leaves. Infuse it for 24 hours, strain into a clean bottle, refrigerate and use to sweeten drinks. Use with 1 month.

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NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with PROJECT: PFC's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.

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2. Honey

Although honey mostly contains simple sugars and water, it has many medicinal properties, including the ability to heal skin wounds when applied topically, as well as relieving colon ulcers. It is a healthier option due to its levels of vitamins, minerals and enzymes. It also has antibiotic properties and it is rich in antioxidants, making it effective at fighting respiratory infections. Especially good is Manuka honey that contains unique antibacterial and antiseptic compounds that are helpful for stomach ulcers, colds and coughs. Also unrefined honey, which is rich in pollen, can relieve the symptoms of seasonal allergies. Unpasteurized and unfiltered honey is the most nutritious. Store away from light at a room temperature to retain its properties. You can use honey as a simple cough syrup which is rich in vitamin C: combine 1 tsp. of honey with a little bit of lemon juice and grated fresh ginger.

3. Maple Syrup

Maple syrup is a made from the sap of a maple tree. It is rich in compounds that have anticancer and antibacterial properties, as well as manganese and zinc that contribute to heart health, increasing men fertility and protects against prostate enlargement. It also contains much more calcium than honey and less sodium. It has also shown to improve the body's sensitivity to blood-sugar regulating hormone insulin. When you buy maple syrup look for 100% organic maple syrup. You can add it to coffee, tea, porridge or marinades.

You can also drizzle or mix it into sweet potato mash.

For cleansing and detoxing of 1 day fast mix 3/4 cup maple syrup, juice of 3 small lemons, 2 tsp cayenne pepper and 7 cups of purified water. Drink throughout the day. If you are interested in detoxifying your body, you can find more useful information in my e-book *The Detox Guide*. This guide will teach you how to use detox to cleanse and energize your body naturally and safely.

4. Molasses (treacle)

This is dark brown syrup produced when sugar cane is turned into refined sugar. Although it provides the same energy boost as refined sugar, it is rich in calcium which is good for strong bones, iron to enrich the blood, potassium to relieve muscle cramps, and B vitamins to help metabolism and strengthen the nervous system. When you buy molasses make sure it doesn't contain sulphur as a preservative (unsulphured molasses). It is great for baking and gives baked goods a distinctive flavor. It is also used in barbecue sauces and baked beans. You can make a tea by adding 1 tsp of molasses to ginger tea as a remedy for abdominal cramps, or take it first thing in the morning before food as a natural laxative and energy provider. It's also a useful iron supplement for those who suffer constipation associated with iron supplements. Molasses can also help you if you have premature grey hair.

5. Date Sugar

Date sugar is made from very finely chopped dry dates. The problem is that it doesn't dissolve like other sugars, making it an impractical additive in drinks. When baked, it may appear in the food like small brown flecks, and its taste gives an overall sweetness to baked goods. Date sugar is sweeter than regular or brown sugar, so some people use 2/3 cup date sugar for every 1 cup of sugar. But if you don't want to bake with this sugar, you can still find other uses for it, for example, you can sprinkle it on top of a plain yogurt and fruit, or sprinkle it on top of pancakes or waffles. Many people like date sugar because it goes through minimal processing and is considered more natural than sugar derived from sugar cane. You're can find date sugar in natural foods stores or buy it online.

Controversial substitutes

1. Coconut Sugar

Coconut sugar is made from sap of the coconut palm that has been extracted and then boiled and dehydrated. It is claimed to have a low glycemic index and retains some of the nutrients found in the coconut palm.

Why is it controversial – There are no published standards for coconut palm sugar production, and many of the nutrient claims may be unfounded. Also there are doubts regarding the glycemic index as no major studies have been made. Also some brands may be mixed with cane sugar or other ingredients and the quality of the coconut palm sugar itself can vary greatly depending on the type of tree the sap is collected from, the age of the tree and the time of year. All these factors haven't been studied or standardized.

2. Xylitol

Xylitol is a naturally occurring sugar alcohol that is found in low concentrations in the fibers of many fruits and vegetables. It can be extracted from the plant fiber of birch trees, various berries, plums, corn and various other fruits and vegetables. Xylitol is low in calories compared to white sugar, and has a significantly lower glycemic index than sugar, so it is absorbed more slowly than sugar, and doesn't contribute to increasing blood sugar levels, and that makes it a good choice for diabetics and others who suffer from blood sugar issues. This is a tooth friendly sugar that also has plaque reducing effects as confirmed by research. It is added to some chewing gums and other oral care products such as toothpastes to prevent tooth decay and dry mouth.

Why is it controversial – Although it is considered harmless for humans, don't leave xylitol out around your pets as even small amounts can be fatal for dogs. Some people argue that this is a sign that it's toxic to us as well. Another point is that although xylitol is a naturally occurring substance, commercially-available xylitol is produced through a chemical process which makes it a highly processed sugar. Xylitol can also cause diarrhea and intestinal gas as side effects.

3. Agave Syrup

This syrup comes from a plant indigenous to Central and South America. It is fast becoming the preferred sweetener for health-conscious consumers as well as diabetics who have found agave to be an alternative to conventional sweeteners. It comes as a flavorful liquid, similar to a runny honey. Many people believe that it has a low glycemic index that provides sweetness without the unpleasant sugar rush that is associated with processed sugars or artificial corn syrup.

Why is it controversial – Agave syrup is highly processed just like other sugars. According to WebMD website, nutritionally and functionally, agave syrup is similar to high-fructose corn syrup. It does contain small amounts of calcium, potassium, and magnesium, but not enough to matter nutritionally.

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