



Q&A Sugar & the Heart

Q: Haven't we always known sugar is bad?

General healthy eating recommendations, including those of the Heart Foundation, have traditionally included limiting sugary foods and drinks. This is because added sugar is deemed an 'empty nutrient' – it provides calories but no nutritional value.

Until recently, the scientific evidence for the impact of sugar on health issues like body weight or heart disease has been less conclusive.

Q: What has changed?

Nutrition research is continually progressing and over time evidence builds to become stronger or weaker. In the case of sugar, it has become stronger. The evidence now clearly shows what commonsense always told us, that sugar does impact on body weight (at least in adults). This seems to be because we over-eat sugary foods and drinks because they don't fill us up.

There is also strengthening evidence for an impact of sugar on other risk factors for heart disease such as cholesterol and triglycerides, and type 2 diabetes.

Q: Don't some Tick products have a lot of sugar in them?

The Tick programme sets criteria for energy, saturated fat, salt and other relevant nutrients to help people identify healthier options within food categories. We frequently review the Tick criteria to take into account research developments, and recently re-introduced sugar criteria into a number of food categories such as breakfast cereals and nut and seed bars. Sugar criteria may be phased into other relevant food categories as they come up for review.

Q: So what is recommended?

We recommend that for general healthy eating and for heart health, adults and children limit the amount of added sugar they eat or drink.

In particular, we recommend you cut back on foods or drinks that are high in added sugar, such as soft drinks or cordials, lollies, cakes, biscuits, and similar foods or drinks.

There are naturally-occurring sugars in healthy foods like fruit and plain milk, and we encourage people to eat these foods. Rather than focusing on single nutrients, we recommend eating a diet consisting of mostly whole and less-processed foods, as part of a heart healthy diet.