

**Sweet Surrender:**

**Shake Your Sugar Habit**

Chances are you already know that eating too much sugar isn’t good for you. Yet you’re probably still overdoing it. Americans average about 270 calories of sugar each day, that’s about 17 teaspoons a day. This compares to the recommended limits for men of no more than 9 teaspoons (36 grams or 150 calories) of added sugar per day. Women should consume no more than 6 teaspoons (25 grams or 100 calories).

There are several health problems associated with ingesting too much sugar. Weight gain, Heart Disease, Diabetes, Depression and accelerated skin damage are all associated with excess sugar consumption. Let’s examine four easy ways to cut back on sugar.

**Know how much you eat –** Take a look at what treats you have during your average day and be mindful of how it adds up. Notice habits you might be able to adjust—such as always grabbing a doughnut when you buy a cup of coffee in the morning, reaching for a sugary pick-me-up in the afternoon, and having dessert every night. Cutting out just one of those each week will help with your overall sugar intake.

**Start reading food labels** – Sugar sneaks its way into many otherwise healthy foods. Once you start paying attention you may be surprised that there is 5 grams of added sugars in a slice of Dave’s Killer 21-grain bread, 14 grams in a serving of Cascadian Farm Oats & Honey granola, and 11 grams in a 4.5-ounce tub of Noosa vanilla-bean yogurt. Other surprising sources include pasta sauce, salad dressing, marinades, barbecue sauce, ketchup, and snack bars. Choosing the option lowest in added sugars is an easy way to eliminate several grams of sugar a day. You won’t miss it, and that way you can save the sugar you do consume for something where it really matters.

**Check your drinks** – Sweetened drinks are the No. 1 source of added sugars in the American diet. But soda isn’t the only culprit. Sweetened iced teas and coffee drinks also pack a sugary punch: A 16-ounce bottle of Snapple Peach Tea contains 40 grams of added sugars and the vanilla-flavored syrup in your latte adds up to 20 grams of sugar. Compare that with 37 grams in a 12-ounce can of cola. Although trading sweet drinks for water is the healthiest move, it’s not the easiest. If you’re trying to give up soda, try sparkling water flavored with mint leaves, citrus, or a splash of fruit juice. For coffee and tea drinks, a spice such as cinnamon or nutmeg will add flavor without sugar.

**Add your own** – If you want to add sweetness to drinks or food, start doing it yourself. Buying unsweetened tea or coffee allows you to control how much sugar you add. You’re unlikely to spoon in the dozen or more teaspoons of sugar that you’d get in a presweetened drink. The same holds true for foods like cereal, oatmeal, and yogurt. Buy plain versions and mix in your own sugar, honey, or syrup. See if you can reduce it from 2 teaspoons to 1, then down to ½ teaspoon over the course of a few weeks.

 Visit [www.commonhealth.virginia.gov](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov) for more information.